POLITICIANS AND MORALISTS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

By EMILE FAGUET

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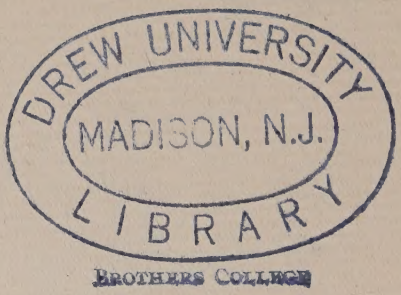

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Since the death of Sainte-Beuve, no critic, with the possible exception of Brunetière, exerted a wider influence in France than Faguet. Learned without being pedantic, original without being extreme, he brought to the study of letters and politics a mind crammed with ideas. His work had an enormous range. He was not less at home in the tragic drama of the seventeenth century than among the political philosophers of the nineteenth. And he always refused—with wisdom—to draw a line separating politics from life. The theories of the one were, as he insisted, the outcome and reflection of the other.

Some thirty years ago Faguet published three volumes upon French social thought in the nineteenth century. They covered the period from the ultramontane revival—of which Bonald and Maistre were the central, and Lamennais the most dramatic, figures—down to the epoch when the disillusion of the Franco-German War was reflected in the sceptical analysis of Taine and Renan. These studies have justly become classical in France; and I have been told by Dr G. P. Gooch that Lord Acton rated them very highly. They have not been hitherto accessible in English; and, since the literature upon French thought since 1815 in our own tongue is pitifully small, it seemed desirable that some part of them, at least, should be available. Miss Galton has, accordingly, translated the last of the three series, partly because it contains in the essays on Stendhal, Taine and Renan some of the most noteworthy of Faguet's portraits, and partly because the influences it studies are still living and creative in French contemporary thought. If the present series seems to meet a public need, it may perhaps be possible, later, to translate the other volumes.

H. J. L.

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Brothers College

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This third volume is the last of the series to which I have given the title, *Politicians and Moralists of the Nineteenth Century*. In the first volume I made a study of those thinkers who had lived through the French Revolution, and I showed how, through their experience of it, they had conceived either a profound aversion from new things, or a strong and ardent hope in the future, or the need of consolidating and organizing the fruits of victory. Here were such as de Maistre, de Bonald, Staël, Constant, Royer-Collard and Guizot.

In a second volume I dealt with all the political philosophers who believed in the necessity and the possibility of organizing a new "spiritual force," to be a guide for the conscience of men and an inspiration for their minds. This new "spiritual force" constituted for some the old spirit refreshed in some way and rejuvenated and adapted to the needs of the modern world, and for others a really new spirit which should be not a religious renaissance but the creation of a religion.

This second volume is, of the three, the one in which there is the most unity by reason of its subject. All the thinkers with whom I dealt had at least this in common, that they concentrated their thoughts and their desires upon the idea of the restoration or the creation of a spiritual force considered by them all to be necessary. Here are such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Lamennais, Ballanche, Quinet, Victor Cousin and Auguste Comte, all either saturated with, or at least tinged with, a religious feeling, all convinced of the necessity for the careful and strict organization of moral tendencies, and all, in truth, more or less born leaders of conscience.

This third volume proves the general failure of the thinkers dealt with in the second. Here we meet Stendhal, Tocqueville, Proudhon, Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Renan—that is to say, philosophers extremely divergent in character. This is the first point for consideration. It cannot even be said of them that they pursue the same, or even similar, ends. They differ still more one from the other than did the philosophers of the eighteenth century, among whom there was little in common.

So the reader must not expect any unity in the volume which he is about to read.

The dream of a "spiritual force" is almost completely abandoned by all the philosophers with whom this book deals. Renan alone, whose comprehensive mind was capable of reflecting the whole century and much more besides, retained something of this conception—or was it rather a desire or a regret? —and comes back to it, especially in the volume which was the first written and the last published of his works. All the others, and indeed Renan himself, turned their thoughts away from religion, to other things, and were by no means restorers or founders of religious creeds.

What are they, then? Either sceptics or positivists, or merely observers. Stendhal believes nothing; if one could call admiration a kind of faith, his only creed was love of force. Stendhal could be considered as the first of the Nietzscheans, if this place were not occupied by Voltaire. Stendhal believes in force as others believe in justice, and he almost holds that energy, even applied to criminal ends, is the sole virtue of mankind. He was no reasoner and could not resolve his ideas into a system. If he had done so, he would have revealed himself as a sceptic, contemptuous of and hostile to all kind of morality, holding that humanity is led by those who are strong and who despise it, and that such a state of affairs is not at all bad.

Sainte-Beuve, still more profoundly sceptical, does not credit humanity with any sort of ideal, not even with an admiration for force. Sceptic and dilettante, he used his splendid intellect merely to observe, understand and explain all things. He was an investigator, but he does not lead the mind along the path of any particular assertion or belief. He almost feared belief and certainty, because to him they were a kind of spider's web in which the mind risks being imprisoned because its ideas are caught there. From his conception of history and natural history—for he was at once a historian and a natural historian—one cannot extract a single law, a single precept, nor even a single line of ethical advice, unless it were perhaps that that life is beautiful which is devoted "to beautiful reading and pleasant writings"—a *credo* which cannot be expected to appeal

to a very large part of humanity. If it is characteristic of the decadent among great minds to look upon the world as an interesting place, in which, however, one is disinterested, and to journey through life as through a very amusing foreign country, which is all the more amusing because foreign, and must be regarded as foreign in order that it should remain amusing — then Sainte-Beuve is the shining light among decadents.

Taine was a pessimistic positivist, whose mind was daunted at an early age by contemplation of the perversity of mankind and the cruelty of nature. He was also surely convinced that the secret of life after death is closed to the understanding of man, and so, amid the hostility of nature and the horrors of humanity, without hope as a refuge for his melancholy and sadness, he lived in a kind of mental oppression, whence it was impossible that any healthy or inspiring doctrine should spring. Generally a kind of resigned Stoic, sometimes nervous and irritable, he could only preach in moments of wisdom what he himself practised—the abstention and tolerance of the old maxim of the Portico—but he added thereto, in the manner of the Stoics, scrupulous care for personal honour and dignity. He was one of those who learn to despair wholeheartedly and dispassionately. He certainly taught courage, though not in the fashion of the vigorous, who say "Courage!" with a confident and joyful smile, but in a way which was not encouraging. Venerable and even dear in the eyes of our generation, he was regarded as a master of ethics only by some very keen disciples who perverted his teaching while assimilating it, and skilfully led it to conclusions which were in no way those of Taine himself. It would be reasonable to sum up his general ideas as follows: that human nature is bad, and that nobody has the power to reform it; that one must suffer it with patience and dignity, and escape from life by the "slow and intelligent and honourable suicide" which is work.

Renan was much more capable of cheerfulness and gaiety, and even of kindness and indulgence, and consequently of influencing man. Yet, after all, he troubled himself very little about a course of action, which means necessarily that actually

he had not much faith. He was too fond of believing everything to be able to believe anything; and it is he who gave to the world this new form of scepticism, fine and generous, which consists in believing everything. Undoubtedly, at one time he believed in science, like Comte, whom he had not then read, like Arago, like Berthelot, but such belief was fashionable in 1848. This period did not last very long, and he was soon overcome by scepticism of the particular nature mentioned above, the scepticism of believing everything. I am not concerned here with whether this attitude of his—or rather his many attitudes—was remarkable; but they left no foundations, and the results were negative. I would not say that there were no results at all. I mean, by negative results, that Renan teaches us, or seems to teach us, *not to be* sectarian, *not to be* intolerant, *not to* hate each other because of differences of belief, etc.—and one must not be exacting about it—but he does not teach us *to be* something, and does not give us either a new belief or a new doctrine, or a confirmation of ancient beliefs or doctrines. He praised the world pleasantly, the world and all that it thought and could think, thinking and expressing himself more happily than any of us could do. He delighted us, he smiled at us and about us, in such a way that, at the same time, we scarcely grasped how much scorn there was in his words of approval, how much condescension even in his epigrams. He diverted us, and was diverted by us; he was informative and sometimes was on the point of perverting us. Above all, he made us think, a quality which always renders inestimable service; but he did not fortify or strengthen us. It would be foolish to label "Renanism" as intellectual irony or frivolous sophistry, as it has been called, but at the same time it must be admitted that Renanism is not, after all, a doctrine, or even something from which a doctrine might be evolved.

I have left aside Tocqueville, solemn and bitter, who had only time to be a historian and politician, and could not leave to the world any legacy of ethical ideas. I would like to point out that the positivist Proudhon is still, of those whom I have studied in this book, the one who had the highest and relatively the clearest ideal. Of course he is a positivist; he believes that

world revolutions always result from economic causes and that they are only shocks resulting from the prosperity or the adversity of humanity. But at the same time, he has an idol, he has a deity, towards which he raises his eyes and stretches his arms. He adores Justice, and he believes that the evolution of Man leads him slowly upwards along the path of Justice as if towards his end. That is the basis of Proudhon's philosophy, his leading thought among so much that is confused and contradictory. I have so often said that this is a false idea that my readers will not be surprised that I repeat that assertion, and will allow me briefly to restate it. The idea of Justice is false as soon as it is given a general application. Nothing is more certain than that it is just to pay what one has promised to pay; just not to condemn an innocent man, just to punish a guilty one according to the terms of the social contract which he knows; in a word, that it is just to conform to a contract in which one has acquiesced, and that to act otherwise is nothing but iniquity, ferocity and barbarism. But to generalize and to extend the idea of justice beyond the idea of a contract is at once to confound iniquity and inequality, equality and justice, and to declare that where there is inequality there is no justice, where there is inequality there is barbarism. This is the idea which is false, this is the idea which is anti-social and which will destroy any race which becomes infatuated by it. It was the leading idea of Proudhon. It is, in my opinion, a false idea, but it is lofty and fine and cannot fail to add to the reputation of one who was so consumed by it as almost to make a superstition of it. Here at least is a man who had an ideal, a thought capable of becoming a doctrine. If it is a doctrine whose weakness is proved on examination of facts, at least it can inspire and can lead the minds of men, not, perhaps, towards the complete and absolute realization of itself—an impossible thing—but towards tentative studies and the accumulation of detail, useful and honourable to the human race.

But we see that, generally speaking, our thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century, on the whole more brilliant, more acute, more interesting than their predecessors, aimed less high, looked to the future with less confidence and courage,

attempted things less great, and leave us with an impression rather of their discouragement, disillusion and weariness.

It seems to me that in the matter of ethical thought we have performed a complete cycle and have arrived back at the starting-point of one hundred and twenty years ago. At the beginning of this century it was observed that the eighteenth century had been above all a negation, and that it had been concerned above all with destruction; so an attempt was made to construct or reconstruct. This attempt failed, and then some set themselves to revive and strengthen the ideas of Condillac, others to reproduce exactly the dryly negative spirit of the secondary philosophers of the nineteenth century—and in this respect Stendhal is a curious example—while others observed in a detached sort of way, and played brilliantly with their ideas, with greater skill but in the same spirit in which it could be, and was, done in the salons of 1770.

And during that period, the old intellectual and moral forces which were in vogue throughout Europe in the eighteenth century, Catholicism versus Protestantism, were brought again face to face, and were shared by those minds which the independent philosophy had, so to speak, overlooked; and this phenomenon, which surprises some people, is not really very remarkable, after the failure of the new " spiritual force " which had been the dream of the so much-scorned visionaries of 1840.

Although, as I have said elsewhere, modern individualism combats and represses the need for a " spiritual force," even so, this need never entirely disappears. And if it does not succeed in creating a new method of expressing itself, then it improves upon the old method or methods. I would not be at all surprised if in the twentieth century there should be a France very stoutly Catholic; but may God spare us from it, for it would not be pleasant for the Protestant and free-thinking minority. And I would not be astonished—for it is not always the numerically strongest who govern—if there should be in the twentieth century a France very stoutly Protestant; and may God equally spare us from that, and for the same reason reversed.

Whatever may be its merits, moral and political philosophy

at this moment cannot be accused of having too high ambitions. Political science has been "constituted a science" under the name of Sociology. I see no objection to this course: but too often, at the hands of those desirous of being rigorously "scientific," its attention has been given to statistical studies, in themselves heroic, wherein it has buried itself and whence it has no effect and no hold upon public opinion. In this way, the business of directing public opinion, or rather of leading it with the necessary enthusiasm into the confused battle of ideas, has fallen rather too much upon the newspapers, which is to say upon the passions, or the interests disguised as passions. We are lacking a Proudhon or a Renan, a Proudhon who would not be contradictory or a Renan who would not be fond of contradicting himself. When one expresses one's wishes one might just as well express them wholly and as pretentiously as possible!

For myself, I pray that there will come a man who will use the strength of his genius to persuade this weary country, first of all, to love itself profoundly, warmly, strongly. I would not recommend the cult of the ego to an individual; but to a country the cult of itself must be presented as a duty. When patriotism is no longer a virtue it will be a necessity, so long as there are other races among whom it is still fashionable. Therefore one must never cease to praise and exalt patriotism as the first among duties and the most essential among virtues, without which all others would be useless.

I would like also that this man should, if possible, undeceive the nation as to the myth of absolute equality. Of all our secret ills this, the least secret and at the same time the deepest, is the one which corrupts us even in our living works. Every nation which cultivates this malady will very quickly perish from it, and it is even best that it should perish. But it is by means of patriotism that this dangerous myth of equality can be effectively combated, if inequalities and hierarchical differences are represented as sacrifices to be made for one's country, for its organization, for its ordered and consequently powerful existence. Every self-loving nation feels instinctively that it must choose between the injurious need for equality and the legitimate and healthy

need for its own survival, and that these two things cannot exist side by side.

I want also that this man with his powerful voice should not only point the way which leads to Democracy, but should above all devote himself to the mission of teaching the rising aristocracy its duties and its interests. What, however, is this rising aristocracy? I do not know; but I am sure that there is one in the act of formation; for there is always one in more or less slow process of evolution from the heart of the people. Is it Plutocracy? Perhaps, and I am inclined to believe so. Is it the Catholic Church and its following? Is it the Protestant Church and its following? Is it the Army? These are all possible. But whoever will be the victor, or better the hegemonist, of to-morrow, whatever will be the aristocracy which will break loose, for a more or less long historical period, from the chaos or, if you like, the obscurity of the present moment, it will have to be persuaded, and it can be told in advance, that the life of an aristocracy depends upon the services which it renders, which is the same as saying that in order to live it must make sacrifices.

Do not let us be mistaken. Since the disappearance of the secular aristocracy of the old régime we have had several attempts to form an aristocracy in France. Under the Restoration it was religious in character, under the July Government, bourgeois, under the Second Empire, as under the First, military. They all fell very quickly, chiefly but not entirely through faults of their own. They fell as a result of their egoism; they fell because they made that mistake of mental and spiritual attitude which consists in believing that a victory is an occasion for grabbing. One after another each thought only of himself.

They had at least some chance of success and, for myself, I believe that one of them would have lasted, if they had realized that an aristocracy is a self-sacrificing organism, existing on the strength of the duties which it can perform and perishing because of the duties which it forsakes. The aristocracy of to-morrow must be made to understand now that it will commit suicide not only if it abuses its victory, but also if it takes advantage of its victory and behaves as a conqueror. This

is a formidable task. It is always said that the education of Democracy is difficult. But more difficult still is the education of the successive aristocracies which are formed on the moving surface of democracies.

And finally, this man, whose coming I await, will have to tell everybody that the secret of social progress is perfectly expressed in that oft-scorned device which can be read on the frontage of our public buildings—but only on condition that one knows how to understand it: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." He who discovered this device was unknown, perhaps ignorant, and surely he did not suspect that in these words he had so well summed up the social problem by thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Liberty and Equality are contradictory terms, but the contradiction which they make is resolved by the term Fraternity.

Liberty is opposed to Equality—for Liberty is essentially aristocratic. Liberty never gives itself, never concedes itself: it must be won. Now Liberty can only be won by such social groups as have been able to acquire for themselves coherence, organization and discipline, and which are, consequently, aristocratic groups. The only things which prevented despotism in ancient France were the Nobility, the Church and the Parliaments, three aristocratic organisms. All liberty is a privilege or it is ineffectual. It can also be a custom, a national tradition: but such liberty has only apparent strength and it is amazing to see how a violent blow can reduce to nothing in a day what seemed to be a constituent law and inalienable property of the whole nation. Liberty is essentially aristocratic.

And, similarly, Equality is opposed to Liberty. Inevitably it resolves itself into government by one, accepted or tolerated by the many, through dread of the government of the few. Government by the many is government by one, for, though government by the many is the theory and the battle-cry, in practice government by one is bound to result almost immediately. Equality exists only under despotism, because despotism makes equality,and because equality likewise produces despotism —and maintains it. Every democracy has a tendency towards despotism, not out of desire but of necessity.

Liberty and Equality are then contradictory, and one term

excludes the possibility of the other; *but the term Fraternity reconciles them.*

Liberty combined with brotherly love of each for each would be a system of privileges, but such privileges would be accepted and loved as guarantees of national independence and strength, and, moreover, they would become gentle, open and hospitable, the protectors and champions of public well-being, without arrogance and pride, conceived rather as duties than as privileges.

Equality combined with brotherly love of each for each would be tolerant of liberties, would be neither jealous of nor annoyed by them, and would not have recourse to despotism to rid itself of them. Moreover, in such a combination, Equality would call forth liberties and privileges as necessary stepping-stones to social organization, it would not crave oligarchy where there was hierarchy, and just as Liberty would create a real equality, so Equality would create a system of liberties, real and not dangerous.

Fraternity, then, would not only reconcile Liberty to Equality, but it would cause them to be created one by the other. From Equality it would manage to produce public liberties, and from these it would produce, maintain, support and sanction a really profound equality, not an apparent and nominal one. For, as I have said elsewhere, it is from Equality that true liberties are made, and from Liberty that true equality is made. And the liberties which evolve themselves, which liberate themselves, are certainly liberties, but with the rather hard and rather exclusive character of privileges; and the Equality which is evolutionary and thinks only of itself is certainly a type of equality, but it has a negative character, it is only the exclusion of superiorities and it has nothing deep, solid, fruitful or even healthy about it.

And thus it is, after all, that Liberty and Equality should produce each other, if they are to survive; but on condition that Fraternity inspires them both, penetrates them and renders them fruitful.

We are continually reminded of this truth, that the only active element in Humanity is love, especially in a nation whose last word and whole secret is patriotism and " let each man love the other." And if it has been rightly said that, at bottom, the

social question is a moral question, that means that in reality all political questions are moral questions.

It is for this reason that I chose for the title of this series of studies the words, "Politicians and Moralists." It is for this reason that I have dealt in these volumes only with those who were at once politicians and moralists, or self-styled moralists. It is for this reason that I hope there may come one—or more—great thinker who, like most of those whom I have studied here, will always consider the moral problem in conjunction with the political, and will strive without ceasing to resolve one in the light of the other. I hope that the political moralists of the next century will have as much talent as those of the century which is now closing, and better luck in finding a basis for their faith.

E. F.

November 1899.

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STENDHAL

STENDHAL

We all know that Providence likes to amuse herself, for we have the assurance of the Vedas that the world is one of the thirty-four comedies which exist for her entertainment. She has some malicious pastimes. She takes pleasure in upsetting our plans and in confusing our reckonings. One of her not infrequent tricks is, so to speak, to displace intelligent men, to put into one century a man who was obviously made to be in another, and who finds himself quite bewildered and unrecognizable in the period wherein he was born. This mischance, which is not entirely without its compensations, befell Stendhal. He is a "déplacé." He lived, in the first half of the nineteenth century, as in a house whose inmates he did not know and in a costume which did not become him. For this reason, he was whimsical and he acquired a certain oddness and some rather bad manners: but none the less he is very interesting. The "déplacés" are as curious to study as the "déclassés." Stendhal, who was a bit of both, excites and constantly attracts attention. It is interesting to speculate what was the effect, upon a man of his worth, of living in a period which was repugnant to him and of which he himself was almost the opposite. It constitutes him a credible though bewildered witness of events. One feels that he cannot say the ordinary things, and this is surely not a fault in him. Let us then examine this stranger, question this anachronism, this man who was, so to say, forced to be an original and who actually succeeded, in spite of the continual efforts he made to be so.

I

About 1798, the young Henri Beyle was a small boy, discreet, intelligent, already observant, perceptibly vicious, and vain beyond all words; wherein he was not very much distinguished from many French boys of fifteen. But he had a characteristic—I do not know whether to call it a fault or a quality—which was incredibly and insuperably pronounced in him. He was impermeable. We are all subjected to a multitude of influences which by assimilation help to make up our disposition and character. Stendhal would not be influenced; he resisted with might and main. *Recalcitrat undique tutus.* Later on, when he thought to become a baron, he put in his projected coat-of-arms a hedgehog. He is intractable at bottom and incapable of being tamed. Examples and lessons are equally useless to him and equally repugnant; they succeed only in sending him in the opposite direction to that intended. It is vanity, pride; but even something stronger than vanity, something more fierce than pride; it is a passion for revolt, a mania for antipathy.

"Our parents and our masters," he said later, "are our natural enemies when we enter the world." He felt that they were his enemies from the cradle. It would be impossible for one person to hate another more violently than Stendhal hated his father. Words fit only for the mouths of hangmen and assassins are used a hundred times in the diaries of Stendhal when he refers to this honourable bourgeois of Grenoble; and one fails to see what was this monster's crime against his son, unless it were that he took him too often to a country-house which the young man did not like, and only granted him in 1804 an allowance of two thousand four hundred francs, equivalent to six thousand in present times.[1] But this attitude of the young Stendhal is pathological. He is always raging against those who *want to have an influence upon him*. His mind, his conscience and his soul are composed of all those sentiments and ideas which do not exist among those who bring him up. They are religious; enough, he will spend all his life railing against priests. They are aristocrats: though instinctively aristocratic himself, he will curse himself a thousand times for this propensity. They lament, in 1793, the death of Louis XVI.; he swears that at that period, when he was ten years old, this news made him leap for joy. And so with everything; it would not be a very big exaggeration to affirm that all his life, whenever he wanted to decide what he ought to think or feel, he asked himself: "What would be the opinion of my father or my aunt?"—for with him it was a question of saying, thinking and feeling the opposite.

This dominating need of his nature followed him all his life. He had to contradict and annoy. Men in office, men of high repute, famous men, fashionable men, men whom the world had honoured or approved, he recognized them all as so many fathers, designed by universal consent to be respected by him. Therefore he abhorred them, and he made a point of always misconstruing them and of being opposite to them. It was his criterion, or rather, instinctively he went straight to the antipodes of all these people.

To all his natural instincts this tendency gave a special form, character and energy. He was sensual by disposition: the

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necessity he felt to scandalize made him brag of his vices in a rather puerile, and often a quite ridiculously cynical, way. He displayed brutally and with tormenting insistence an immorality in which he really did not exceed the common limits. He lavished admiration upon bad habits. It delighted him to repeat a thousand times: "I am immoral. See how immoral I am!" He made of immorality a sort of virtue and a kind of privilege which he believed to be beyond the reach of everybody. He established it as an aristocratic title.

He was vainglorious by birth; his need to be uncivil gave to his vanity a certain sort of heavy fatuity, which is burdensome in its insistence and is obtrusively defiant. No other author so often treated his readers as imbeciles. He writes always: "Pass over the next twenty pages: you will not understand them. . . . I write here for a few chosen spirits. . . . I shall be understood in 1900. . . . Here ten pages which would be sublime. I will suppress them. Too beautiful, too true, they would shock present-day taste." I do not exaggerate; indeed, I think I underrate his vanity. What is to be said of him? That he was at once horribly vain and horribly timid, as is often the case, and that as he writes he thinks of his reader. He has him before his eyes, and wants to intimidate him, to subjugate or stun him. The real thinker writes with his thoughts only upon his idea, alone with it, his eyes upon it, intoxicated with the desire to seize it, to master it and give it the most careful expression. Stendhal thinks of the reader and of himself and of the effect that the one will have upon the other. And since modesty is a convention, he is pleased to show his scorn for convention by displaying his ego, not naïvely, but with premeditation and skill. The reader must know how fond of tea M. de Stendhal is, and how bad was that which was served to him at Tours, in 1841; also that M. de Stendhal tasted, at Geneva, in 1822, some *aqua rossa* which was wonderful; and again, that M. de Stendhal was never more happy than at half after midnight, drinking punch and rum in company with various ladies, all versed in the arts of love. Information of this sort takes up many pages by reason of its importance. Stendhal maintained all his life that vanity was the only quality of the Frenchman.

In proof of this assertion, he gave us many reasons and one example.

A need for contradiction, vanity, epicurism—these are the first characteristics, the forces that move in the depths and inmost recesses of Stendhal's disposition. He cultivated them with infinite care. The education of his character took place between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, and it did not correct his faults: it exaggerated them. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five years he was for a time a soldier, then an actor, then a clerk in a grocery store, but always an adventurer. He fought in Italy and spent some time there as a victorious young officer; then, finding himself with nothing to do in Paris, he played in comedy with Dugazon, out of love for the theatre and for actresses, and mingled with a very suspicious underworld of actors, actresses and "enlightened amateurs of the arts"; then he followed a little actress to Marseilles, where he spent one or two years "measuring brandy" in a grocery store. Although he wasted thus his youth, it did not prevent him from being well informed, and even well bred when necessary; but it deprived him for ever of what little refinement he might have had, and gave him that vulgarity which he never lost, that jesting way in argument, that habit of making peremptory decisions, and that habit of exaggerating, not only in making assertions and generalizations, but in everything he said, whatever its importance. There is always in Stendhal, mingled with the shrewd, observant and malicious Dauphinois, something of the hussar of comedy, the strolling player and the old-style commercial traveller: a mingling of Claveroche, of Delobelle and of Gaudissart.

II

His mind was better than his character, and was, without being superior, fairly strong and refined in quality. Above all, he was observant. He was fond of looking at the world and he knew how to do so. His "diaries," relating to the period of his youth up to adolescence, are interesting. There is scarcely any musing and very little theorizing, except on literary subjects, and such passages are as short as they are insignificant. He already reveals

himself as lacking in imagination. Much space is occupied with reflections about himself, some of which are quite acute, but most of them are spoilt by "egotism," as he himself says, and by the overpowering conviction that he was an extraordinary man. There is a crowd of portraits, clear, vigorous, very living, and done in an unaffected, artless, natural way. Here one feels that Stendhal is in his element and that he is engaged upon his own craft. His recollections of childhood, written after a lapse of forty years, have the same quality. One sees clearly and comes to know—I had almost said recognize—his father, his aunt, his uncle, the Casanova of Grenoble, and his grandfather, the great Voltairean bourgeois of 1780. Thus, at the age of twelve, ten even, he had capacity and fondness for observation. His eye was curious and retentive, his moralist's memory steady and sure. Such was he all his life, observing people everywhere, in coaches, in ships, in cafés, in salons, having the power to make them talk, and to take to pieces, with a certain amount of dexterity, these little mechanisms of sensations, feelings, habits and prejudices. It was truly characteristic of him how he tells in the middle of his *Memoirs of a Tourist*, that he abandoned the post-chaise to continue his journey by coach. We see Stendhal setting out on his "journey through France," with the intention of studying the countryside; then he gets tremendously bored and discovers that he is doing nothing, so he sends away the chaise, rides in a coach, eats table d'hôte dinners, and is very interested, feeling that he is working, and exclaiming: "Here is the real way of travelling!" The *Memoirs of a Tourist*, written by Stendhal, are nothing more than the memoirs of a moralist, and the only journey that he knew anything about was the journey among men.

Stendhal's faculty for observation is, generally speaking, of high quality. In the first place he is natural, which is exceedingly rare; for most moralists are men who want to be moralists, who mean to be observers, who set out with the firm intention of seeing accurately, and apply themselves energetically to the business of observing. Stendhal's method of observation is natural, and therefore it is continuous, unvarying, steadily but not stubbornly vigorous, like an instinct. Stendhal observes in

the same way as he contradicts, he is observant in the same way as he is offensive, because it is his nature. This first merit is extreme, incomparable, and puts Stendhal quite in a place of his own beside such as La Bruyère and Saint-Simon, to whom, in other respects, he has no resemblance. The truth is that man is not born to observe his fellows, but, according as he is strong or weak, to use them or serve them; and observation for the sake of observation, the only form which is continued and complete and capable of being artistic, is rare and exceptional. Therefore it is paying a great compliment to a man's powers of observation to say that they are natural. It must be added that, in the case of Stendhal, his observation is very loyal and scrupulous. Side by side with his passion for observing he had a taste for exactitude, two qualities which go together, but do not necessarily form part of each other. Do you notice his manner of speaking when he talks of politics? He is a Liberal, he writes from 1820 to 1840 and he never once uses the word "Liberty." Never! He says often enough, "Two rooms and freedom of the Press," an expression which is dry, long, heavy and always cumbersome in a sentence. That does not matter. Stendhal feels that he must not make use of the word Liberty, that vague, variable word which may mean anything from Asiatic despotism to anarchism. "Two rooms and freedom of the Press!" Excellent! And I know what you are thinking! A Liberal of 1830 who never uses the word liberty deserves to be awarded a gold medal.

This characteristic of precision, loyalty and respect for what he sees is always noticeable, even when he describes things to which he is opposed, and results from his desire to be exact. After some fact, even quite important, which he relates, he writes, *he prints*, quite frankly: "This contradicts my general theory of . . ." Here is a great merit, and one which renders him sympathetic and gives weight to his authority. In all manner of small talk one is with Stendhal on ground which one feels to be safe and in the company of a man of good faith.

It is not necessary to say that this loyalty has its limits in, or rather is obstructed by, the passions of the man. When a general idea, which he has put together from a large number of observa-

tions, is opposed in certain respects to his own ideas, as we have seen, he does not belie nor suppress the parts with which he does not agree; but when one of his general ideas is, as is the case with most of us, in the form of one of his feelings, of one of his likes or his dislikes, I believe, and I will show later on, that he interprets facts in accordance with that idea and ignores anything which might contradict it. But, in the long run, and subject to this reserve, to which I will have occasion to refer later on, Stendhal's powers of observation are exceptionally loyal and reassuringly exact.

I am bound to say that they are incomplete by reason of this same fault which played havoc with Stendhal's genius. Because of his vanity he was embarrassed and timid in the world, preoccupied with making an effect there; he used to repeat to himself, like an actor, things that he would say in public and then never say them; he never knew what to do with his hands—and this is a particularly characteristic trait—until, having bought a beautiful cane to hide the blushes of his embarrassed hands, he found that he got on a hundred per cent. better; in the salons he was too conscious of himself, and too anxious, to make more than occasional observations of well-bred people. There Stendhal's faculty for observing was impeded and paralysed by the vanity in him. Thus it is that, although he moved in all classes of society, it is not about the best people that he gives us the clearest information. When he deals with them, either in his books of pure observation or in his novels, it is in a general and superficial—and I would almost like to say conventional—way, though to apply that word to Stendhal seems unfair and spiteful. Among the bourgeoisie, in the provinces, in Italy, in inns, in diligences, he felt comfortable and observed well, and all his notes dealing with the lower classes of the time of the two charters are precise, nicely detailed and apparently exact. When the name Stendhal comes into my mind I see always a fat man, frank and animated, with tightened lips and black, piercing and searching eyes, who gets into a diligence, starts a conversation by handing round excellent cigars, makes his neighbours talk, takes stock of the way in which they "go in search of happiness," makes inquiries about the love affairs of the neighbourhood, especially

the tragic ones, and thus drains and *empties* his informants: then, when they begin to repeat themselves, he in his turn talks, makes fun of them imperceptibly but good-naturedly, or holds forth bitterly against the Jesuits; and, above all, his mind is set on disappearing at the first posting-house in search of other expansive people, for such must they be, whom he can explore.

Thus Stendhal was, above all, an observer of the middle and lower classes, rather than an "observer of the human heart," as he styled himself. He is the Saint-Simon of the table d'hôte. But that is no small thing, and this fact alone makes him valuable.

There is little else in Stendhal's mentality beyond these observant qualities. He was no philosopher and was almost incapable of having general ideas. When he does express such ideas one is often tempted to wish that he had not done so. They are either the expression of his prejudices and ill-feelings, or, if they are ingenious, novel, and perhaps fertile, he does not know how to use them. He does not deduce anything from them, nor enlarge upon them; he lets them drop as soon as they are born: so that, however kindly one wants to think of him, one is never sure if he has realized the value of their contents or even glimpsed a small part of what might be made out of them. It must be admitted frankly that general ideas of this sort are not more than almost accidental inspirations of the mind, lucky encounters, useful for making a posthumous reputation when others, assuring for them a great future, are nice enough to recognize their indebtedness to him who had first struck them: but they do not give proof of any strength, any largeness, any penetration, scarcely of any vivacity or alertness of the mind. In the matter of general ideas Stendhal sometimes expressed himself happily in conversation. It must not be forgotten that, in his opinion, "the greatest philosopher who ever lived" was Helvétius.

He had keen artistic tastes, or, rather, very personal artistic feelings, a dilettante's profound and, it seems to me, rather original delights. They were truer, as far as I can make out, in the case of painting than in music, but always very passionate, and they rendered him very great service, preventing him from

being merely a morose and angry satirist, and opening up to his understanding certain spheres which without these tastes would have remained foreign to him. He was rather unrefined, with a certain tendency to vulgarity, or the affectation of vulgarity, but through his artistic tastes he gained admittance into the world of refined people and delicate sensations. When one is a sensualist it is something to be accustomed to associate one's mistress in one's mind with a phrase of Cimarosa or a model from the Correggio. Stendhal had very often, almost always, this sort of distinction, which consists in surrounding one's conception of pleasure with delicate, artistic delights and in always mingling beauty with one's dreams or with one's memories of voluptuousness, and thus he really raised himself a few degrees above the barrack-room level. In this way he comes to appreciate things that he would otherwise not have understood, entire social conditions which he would otherwise only have detested, as, for example, society in the time of Leo X. or of Louis XIV. He understands these things and savours them; and, although he does not like them, he is attracted and repelled at the same time, so his feelings are contradictory and often amusingly uncertain. This does not detract from his qualities: on the contrary, we are glad that he found out these things and would be sorry had he not understood them.

A quick and steady eye; passionate curiosity; taste for exactitude; patience in the accumulation of tiny detail; taste, but no talent, for generalization, for which he had no patience, and wherein, on the contrary, he displayed precipitation and levity; a strong liking for the fine arts, considered as elements and ingredients of happiness—such are, it seems to me, the outstanding features of Stendhal's mentality: unreasonable sensuality; rather gross and too obvious vanity; antipathy and resistance to anything that is an authority or is held to be an influence—such is, it seems to me, his disposition. And I think it will be interesting to examine what were the general ideas which issued from a mind of this sort, sometimes served, but more often spoiled, by such a character.

III

Stendhal adored two things, voluptuousness and force.

He believed that the sole aim of man's existence was the search always for the greatest possible amount of pleasure. He absolutely denied and refused to see the existence of the two human tendencies known as altruism and mysticism, of which the one causes us to live in others and the other causes us to live in the dream, the hope or the faith of a world other than that which we see. These two methods by which Man can escape from himself—proofs at least of his need for a life apart from himself—did not enter into Stendhal's understanding, nor did he perceive them or testify to their existence among his fellows. Man is to him a being "who sets out every morning in search of happiness," and the only thing to study about him is how he searches. Man's name is Don Juan, Alcibiades, Borgia, Raphael or Napoleon. It is a mistake to suppose that his name was ever Jesus or Marcus Aurelius. La Rochefoucauld was absolutely right, and even more so was Helvétius, whose doctrine in this respect was still more severe and radical. Man not only is as we have described him above, but he must be so. It is right that he should be thus, and all who either persuade him that he is different or try to force him to be different are sometimes fools, often charlatans, but most often clever tyrants or subtle spongers. All idealistic philosophy is either a heavy intoxication or a suspicious trick; all religion deserves to be described in terms much more severe. The modern German philosophy is the height of absurdity; Christian religions are abominable to all true spirits and friends of humanity. Sensation, here is the aim of life: "To live is to feel life, to have strong sensations." Stendhal studies only one thing: "I look for the art of being happy." The only desirable life he can conceive is the one in which are accumulated the greatest possible number of vivid experiences, delicate pleasures and rare delights.

Such a philosophy in a man of twenty years of age always astounds a middle-aged thoughtful man, and one asks oneself if he really did not once in his life make this elementary observation, that life can only be happy when the search for happiness

has been eliminated. But, although it may seem rather limited, this is Stendhal's entire philosophy. He never had any other, and never wanted to discuss any other form. His ideas date from 1770, and all his life he did not advance them; indeed, any step which caused him to modify them was considered by him a retrogression. He was thus by temperament, and so he remained because of his dread of any kind of authority. The religious revival of the Restoration and the very praiseworthy attempts to found a religious philosophy in 1840 only served to strengthen his belief in doctrines which added the attraction of being outrageous to the merit of being his own.

The other object of his admiration is force. "I like force" is one of his favourite expressions. But we must understand what Stendhal means by force. It is the opposite of force. It is violence: the unexpected relaxing, the sudden blind explosion, purposeless and abortive, of a passion which can neither be repressed nor directed. It is a moment of tragic folly. The ancients gave to it the name *impotentia sui*, and believed that it was weakness. This is the sort of force that Stendhal adores. "The force of the Middle Ages," the violent crimes of the fourteenth century, the delirious thirst for vengeance suddenly let loose in a frenzy, the blood which rises to the head and forces a man to kill with a wild access of mad pleasure, here is the type of force of which Stendhal calmly cites a hundred examples with the exclamation: "Since the fifteenth century there is no such thing as force in Europe." In this respect, the sixteenth century was to him already decadent, and Napoleon's time but a short and sickly revival. His men of force are just *impulsive*. Rarely has a more singular misconception been made. All his life he was the same. It is just his way of understanding the word. He says readily, carelessly, trustfully: "The common people of to-day have some remnant of force in them. They have more than the upper classes. *Look at the number of suicides*." Stendhal has various heroes: Napoleon, Lauzun, Bassompierre; but the one which he cherishes most dearly is Lafargue. Have you read *Baruch*? Have you met Lafargue? Let me introduce you to him. M. Lafargue was a working cabinetmaker, fond of reading novels, who wrote letters to his brother in the style

of the *Nouvelle Heloïse*. In 1828 he fell in love at Bagnères with a girl of humble birth and easy habits, became her lover, was deceived by her and shot her dead with a pistol. He was condemned by the jury of the Hautes-Pyrénées (in those days there were no acquittals) to five years' imprisonment and ten years' supervision, and thanked the jury and the population in these terms: "Honest and honourable inhabitants of this town, the tender interest you have shown for me is known unto me. You will live in my heart." This was received with enthusiasm and the crowd pressed around him. Stendhal, too, was there. Lafargue lives in his heart. He is obsessed, charmed and refreshed by him. In him he finds consolation for the spectacle of this dull world. Three or four times in one volume (*Promenades in Rome*, ii.) Stendhal refers to Lafargue mysteriously, in an impressive tone, as a priest talking of his God: "Last year, the tribunals brought to our notice several crimes committed for love; the accused all belonged to that class which, thanks to its poverty, has no time to consider its neighbour's opinion and the conventions. M. Lafargue, whose life has just been spared by the Assize Court at Pau, has a greater soul than all our poets put together, and more intelligence than most of these gentlemen." Again: "There are without doubt some noble and sensitive souls among us, such as Mme Roland, Mlle de Lespinasse, Napoleon and the condemned Lafargue. To think what I could write if there were a sacred language understood only by these!" And finally, he tells us all about Lafargue, after skilfully arousing our curiosity, and he adds: "This man, whose passions are so forceful and refined, had not three francs to lend his mistress." Poverty conserves force; "such crimes as these do not happen in the upper classes . . . in Paris, life is weary and it is no longer natural and unrestrained. . . . Is Paris on the way to a true civilization? Will Vienna, Milan, Rome, attain to the same degree of elegance, the same *absence of energy*?" Important questions, in which the problem of civilization is involved. Civilization is the diminution of the amount of crime; but the diminution of the amount of crime is evidently a weakening of human force. Is civilization worth bothering about? There is room for hesitation on this question.

This conception of life is quite comprehensible; love and force, voluptuousness and violence, amorous follies and stabbing —it is that of a subscriber to a lending library or an habitué of Grand Guignol. Do not be mistaken, it is Stendhal's. Of course his mind was occupied sometimes with other things; but the little romantic dream which we all have in the back of our mind, and which often unconsciously gives the lead to many of our ideas and plans, took this form with Stendhal, this colour and this quality, perhaps somewhat inferior.

And one can suspect the reason for this. From the age of seventeen to thirty, he himself had led a similar life to that of which he dreamed and which seemed so fine to him—a life of adventures, dangers, love, and a sort of accidental and momentary force. He had loved, had been loved, had been deceived, and had had a great desire to assassinate the faithless one; he had made war, and, if he did not do much stabbing, at least he had met with a good number of gunshots; he had been poor. Things such as these are never forgotten. He expressed admirably in the following words a profound truth: "Among the charms of life, only those which one experienced at the age of twenty-five are capable of pleasing for all time." On the other hand, our conception of life is formed according to what we have felt and experienced at twenty-five. We generalize and idealize the pleasant sensations of this period of life—the only time at which our sensations are strong—and we weave from them a permanent dream, always very dear and very fascinating, whence issue, according to our talents, our poems, our novels, our theories, our systems, our conversations or our chatter. Rousseau himself is an example; Stendhal, too; and hence this conception of life similar to that in the *Memoirs of Casanova*.

Stendhal's views on the habits of his time, including many contradictions, of which we will pick out only those which throw a new light on his turn of mind, are derived almost entirely from the foregoing principles, as well as from his morose and contradictory temperament. Since passion, in the two forms of voluptuousness and force, seems to him man's aim, and the finest exercise for his faculties, he has a natural aversion to anything that tends to reduce it, consume it or merely thwart it.

If he detests religious and spiritual philosophies, he distrusts almost as much reason, in its different forms and various aspects.

There is a reasoning which teaches man to anticipate and endeavour—that is to say, to have large and constant intentions, broad views and infinite patience, and to take pride in sustained effort. Stendhal discerns this sort of reasoning among the English, and shows great hostility towards it. His fondness for "force" does not extend to energy applied to such ends. It is too cold, and makes man too solemn and prudent, forbidding him fine dramatic explosions of violent "force," or, in other words, of unbridled passion. It seems sad and hateful to him, and he makes a mistake, which is common to us all in respect of things we do not like, in giving to it the name of the fault to which it is akin and towards which it has a tendency: he calls it hypocrisy, false modesty, an affectation of bigness and moral force. He is sorry for a race condemned to be sad out of anxiety or desire to have command of its passions.

There is a practical sort of reasoning which teaches man the ethics, not of pleasure, but of the realization of his interests, which advises him to do his business quickly and well and to conduct his life like a well-ordered commercial enterprise. Stendhal believes that this sort of reasoning exists among the Americans, and it grieves him profoundly to think that God has condemned men and women to be born and to live in Philadelphia. What a sad thing it is—perhaps worse than the former case! What an absence of all the passions which are joyful, sweet and tragic! Where is pleasure in such a life, and sensation, emotion? Deplorable Americans, whom we shall perhaps resemble in a generation!

There is another kind of reasoning, of a rather particular character, which advises each man to live practically in the same way as his neighbours, to believe that the majority is almost always right, and, consequently, to value very highly his neighbour's opinion, or, in the fine language of philosophy, the universal consent. This, the reasoning of sociable races, and essentially that of the French, is the most abominable of all. It entirely destroys originality, personality, naturalness, the opening out of our inner selves, candour, good nature and

cynicism. It is all up with man if he lets himself be seduced by it. All French people are more or less, and most of them are entirely, infected with this poison. In plain speaking, what do you think it is? It is adoration of the "model to be copied." On all things whatsoever there is an opinion, made up either by the chosen few or by the mass; upon this opinion is based a model for each action, each doctrine, each prejudice, each measure, each attitude; this model is imposed upon each individual, who believes himself bound to conform to it exactly, in his doings, thoughts, words and actions. The French live like this. It is dreadful. They all utter the same words about any event or person. They think and feel in unison. There is no naturalness. They are a race of monkeys and parrots. The model to be copied is there, to fascinate them and prevent them from being themselves. It is fetishism. In even plainer language, do you know what it is? Vanity. The Frenchman's vanity makes him blush merely if he is not in the fashion. The fashion is general opinion; general opinion is the fashion, nothing more nor less, rather more exacting. The Frenchman's vanity forces him to be in the fashion because, if he were not, he would seem not to know about it; and apparent ignorance of what is being said and happening is the greatest humiliation to French vanity. Hence comes that most insidious, most domineering and most detestable habit of "struggling against naturalness." What energy do you expect a people to display which is always occupied with the question whether what it is doing is proper, correct, and in keeping with the model? It can display only mass-energy. On the battlefield, it is precisely by reason of their vanity that the French are so brave. But what individual force can exist among such a race? And, for example, what can one expect in the way of fine emotional crimes from men so occupied with what others will say?

There is much to be said for this theory of the French character. In the first place, there is truth in it; and, though it may not sum up the whole of the French character, though it is rather ridiculous to consider a single one of our characteristics, which is particularly current among society, as the very basis and entirety of our national disposition, yet to say that French

sociability takes the two forms of government by opinion and tyranny of the model to be copied is true, ingenious and of a nature to explain many things. In this there is a curious and extremely striking application of Stendhal's "principles," if one may use the expression. Voluptuousness and force, these are always his two leading thoughts. His great dislike of the French is explained by the fact that sociability and what it produces and imposes—that is, conventions—are the greatest enemies of violence and voluptuousness. Of all the means which Man has devised for combating "naturalness," so dear to Stendhal, pride is one of the best, practical reasoning is one of the best; and perhaps the most triumphant, apart from the religions, is sociability become a cult, anxiety to behave in conformity with general opinion, the almost religious, superstitious if you like, conviction that the majority is right. It is obvious that there are great inconveniences in this tendency, as in all things; but, if the object of society is to lead us away from a state of nature, then sociability, implying that to think well we must think in common, is certainly the surest method of preventing us from going back to that state. But with his "naturalness," his "simplicity," his "candour," and especially his love of voluptuousness and violence, Stendhal's dream is just this state of nature.

Finally, this theory, and especially the bitter insistence with which Stendhal exposes it at every opportunity, is the best example of what I called the impermeability of Stendhal, and of his continual effort to prove himself impermeable. Our country is our family on a large scale. Instinctively, Stendhal is averse from France, as he was from his family, and he would hate to be suspected of having been influenced by his native land or inspired by his household. He certainly will not be accused of the ridiculous French practice of finding nothing more beautiful than his country. It is true this ridiculous practice exists; but it could be said of Stendhal that he took too much pains to preserve himself from it, and made efforts so passionate as to be themselves rather ridiculous.

Nobody can be always negative, and at last one must affirm and approve something, be it only out of excess of opposition

to what one resents. Stendhal chose for his love a race which seemed to him as far as possible removed from cold, practical and conventional reasoning. He adored the Italians. To him Italy is this " country of love and hate," which he seems to have sought everywhere as the native land of his choice. It is the country of violent passions. " The human plant springs up stronger there than elsewhere." There they love impetuously and they kill for love heartily. It is full of Lafargues. It is the most beautiful country in the world. Above all, its people are natural ; they give themselves up to the sensation of the moment, talk about it without constraint, free from the slightest care of being ridiculous or tedious. It is the country of candour. It is an inexhaustible subject for Stendhal, and one on which he gives vent to his sensations and feelings with an entirely Italian abandon.

His picture of Italian habits, with its crowd of details and anecdotes, which make very good reading, is very fanciful. First of all, in spite of the author's loyalty, for which I have nothing but recognition and praise, one feels that it is a panegyric with a double object, as is the case with most panegyrics, that it is a eulogy of the one and a satire against the other, a homage to Italy designed less to give pleasure to the Italians than to displease the French. Bersot said : " One always loves one person at the expense of another." It is just as in Tacitus' *Germania*, Mme de Staël's *L'Allemagne* and Heinrich Heine's *Lutetia*. It is quite natural ; as Stendhal himself says : " The philosopher who has the misfortune to understand men always scorns most the country in which he learned to understand them " ; but that always detracts from the authority of certain eulogies. But without insisting on the love-passion and the love-crimes, to which Stendhal really gives too much importance in his kindly preoccupations, and which are, like all human follies, almost equally numerous among all peoples of similar civilization, there is much to be said about his ideas of sincerity, candour and naturalness. It is rather curious that Stendhal found real candour only in the race which has produced the greatest European diplomats. It must be noticed that, when Stendhal writes an Italian novel, these charmingly ingenuous people all become

shameless liars and cheats, with the exception, perhaps, of Fabrice, whose father is French. I think I discern in this idea of Italian candour—which must be taken seriously, since Stendhal devoted three or four volumes almost entirely to it—something in the nature of a hasty and too broad generalization. What Stendhal observed, and he cites a thousand examples of it, is the abandon with which Italian men and women speak (or spoke) of their sentimental weaknesses. To French eyes there is a certain immodesty in this, a hint of indelicacy, which Stendhal noticed. But, in his half-honest, half-affected, cynical way, he hastened to make of this a great virtue as opposed to English cant or French prudery, and to consider it as proof of an essentially open, naïve and natural national disposition. It is exceedingly misleading, first, to make too hasty generalizations and, secondly, to give too much attention to what appears to be indelicate and unrefined in a foreign people. You hear a well-dressed Englishman whistling and you conclude that the English are a vulgar race; you see signs of affection too freely bestowed, in your opinion, by a German man upon a German girl, to whom he is only engaged, or perhaps not even that, and you conclude that here is a race lacking in modesty. This is coming to conclusions too hastily. There are differences in habits and conventions, and that is all there is to it. What is unmannerly in France is not considered as such elsewhere, and vice versa, and national temperaments must not be judged by consideration of these entirely exterior and superficial differences. Statistics of suicides, of youthful marriages, of old-age marriages, of marriages without dowry, of illegitimate children—these are the serious things, not the amorous confidences that Stendhal received in Italy, be they to the number of two or three hundred.

However, let us keep in mind this comparison made by Stendhal of the character of the different peoples which he knew, to realize our object of understanding his way of thinking and feeling. He liked peoples who seemed to him to live according to "the good law of nature," and he detested peoples who, in one way or another, attempt to restrain spontaneous passions and to muzzle the human animal. Any contention or convention which has this object irritates him, troubles him or displeases

him. At bottom, he thought that the path of humanity should lie towards the life of voluptuousness and violence, the one consequential upon, but giving relish to, the other, and he did not believe that man should be in any hurry to forsake this path. And here we see fully just what he meant by his beloved " force." In giving examples he finds that energy increases as one descends from north to south, from the Anglo-Saxon race to the Italian; and, to him, the most energetic peoples are those who do not control themselves. This is proof that he did not mean by " energy " what is generally meant by that word.

Stendhal summed up his moral studies of the subject which was dearest to him in a little volume entitled *Of Love*, which is not lacking in talent. Stendhal was fond of love and love stories, and knew a good many ways of loving. In this book, which lacks style, is begun ten times, and is full of repetitions, he deals roughly with the following subjects: different kinds of love; the place of imagination in love; the place of vanity in love; love among the different European peoples; and he includes a large number of rather monotonous anecdotes. I am not going to discuss these latter, for, though they are often interesting, they are always rather extraordinary, rather eccentric, and serve rather as amusing illustrations to the book than as documents or proofs upholding his theories. And I will not study his observations on the ways of loving of the different peoples, for these add nothing to what I have examined above.

Stendhal knows and distinguishes four kinds of love: *physical* love, love-*passion*, love-*taste*, *vanity*-love. I would not reproach this enumeration with being incomplete—all enumerations of this nature are incomplete—if it were not that Stendhal rather lays claim to have completely exhausted the subject. In the first line he says: *There are four different loves*. There are certainly a few more than that: there are types of love which cannot be included in any one of these four divisions. For example, there is love-friendship, which is neither love-passion, being much less violent, nor love-taste, being much more profound. Love-friendship, the fact of loving a person because he is good and sweet, pleasant and reliable, a kind of love-confidence very frequent among the French, is of such importance and of

such consequence as to merit a mention, if not a study. There is love-habit, inferior to the former and more vulgar, a love which does not begin as love, but as an allurement of the senses, and gradually becomes a very strong and tender attachment, a kind of recognition of the flesh, often the bond of a strange force, extremely interesting to analyse and frequent enough to be worth taking into account; but it must not be confounded with physical love, whose character inversely is to ruin itself by possession. There is intellectual love, which begins through the imagination, is maintained and nourished by it, and dies out usually in the realities of love, so that it is really, if I may be permitted a strange expression, a sort of *intellectual* physical love. It is rather extraordinary that Stendhal should have forgotten intellectual love in his book *Of Love*, since in *Scarlet and Black* he made quite a penetrating study of this type of love in the person of Mademoiselle de La Môle. It would be easy to find various other ways of loving which Stendhal has omitted and which deserve a place in a general classification even more than love-vanity, which is really not a love at all. This is of little importance: what I want to point out is that Stendhal describes in this book *Of Love* only the types of love that he was capable of experiencing, and that he did not experience anything beyond sensuality, violent and tragic passion, worldly gallantry and vanity. A book on love is always an autobiography.

Let us leave this classification incomplete. As a matter of fact, Stendhal, who prided himself on being "logical," has not at all followed the plan which he seems to set out in his book, for he deals with scarcely anything but love-passion. Like all Stendhal's books this one is entirely lacking in method.

A thing which he shows up very well, with much ingenuity and a sort of clever divination, and to which he returns time and again after a thousand digressions and much nonsense, is *the effect of the imagination upon love*, how the imagination works upon new-born love, and how it develops and stirs up that love. I say upon new-born love; for, love born of the imagination, spiritual love, is precisely the sort of which Stendhal has made no mention in this book of "Love."

The working of the imagination upon love is what Stendhal

called, in a word which has become famous, " cristallization." A twig of dead wood, placed in particular grottos where the damp air is charged with certain salts, gets covered with sparkling crystals and becomes an aigrette of diamonds. Rightly speaking, love, when it is born, is this twig of black wood; imagination and solitary dreaming slowly turn it into this glistening jewel wherein flame all the fires of heaven. This idea is prettily conceived. Stendhal only showed signs of having imagination where love was concerned, and particularly in the art of dreaming of enjoyment. Listen to this dream called up by a portrait: " Something so pure, so religious, so refined. . . . One feels she has long been unhappy. One dreams of being introduced to this singular woman in some lonely Gothic castle, overlooking a beautiful valley and surrounded by a moat, like Trezzo. . . . One feels oneself almost the intimate friend of a woman as one looks at her portrait in miniature. One is so close to her! . . ." [1] Here is Stendhal in the act of " cristallization."

He knew very well this state of the soul, and from this theory he deduced three or four very interesting points of amorous metaphysics. For example, the theory of modesty forms part of the theory of " cristallization " in the following manner. Modesty is an ingenious form of coquetry, whose aim is, not exactly to make oneself desirable, but to improve one's beauty. To resist is to give him who loves time to " cristallize," to dream of the beloved; in other words, to make her more beautiful and to see her according to his own fashioning: " Modesty lends to love the help of the imagination; it gives life to love." It is a theory which is not at all false and is charming.[2]

In the same way, sincerity and naturalness, just as essential to love as modesty, can be considered as indirect effects of " cristallization," in the sense that they would not exist without it. One must not exaggerate in love, express more than the just measure of sentiment that one feels. Otherwise it does not ring true. But, however, love lives only on exaggerations. Yes, but exaggerations which are sincere, which do not seem to be exaggerations to him who speaks them. But these sincere

[1] *Rome, Naples, Florence, Milan.* 28th November.
[2] Amour xxvi.

exaggerations, the truth of which is believed by him who lavishes them, are born out of " cristallization." Imagination had given to hyperbole the ring of truth.[1]

" Love at first sight " is itself an effect of " cristallization." In this case, it is a question of " cristallization " beforehand. One has made for oneself an ideal. Then one meets one day a being who, through a single characteristic, resembles this ideal—for example, he has a long moustache, or she has fair curls. Around this characteristic one throws all the other qualities which were inseparable from it in one's imagination, and love bursts forth. One says: " How courageous he is ! " —really, he is a coward, but he has a long moustache ! " How sweet she is ! "—actually, she is a bore, but she has fair curls ! And so love is born.[2] This observation is true, but I do not think it applicable to the love-passion, with which our master deals, but to intellectual love. Both intellectual love and love-passion have their " love at first sight," but it is not the same for both. The material above ought to have put Stendhal in the way of making a study of intellectual love, which he has not touched in this volume and to which the theory of " cristallization " could be very well applied, with this difference, that, in the other loves, " cristallization " acts after their birth, and increases them, but in intellectual love it precedes and creates love.

The big defect of this book, apart from its lack of method, its padding and its tedious stories, is that Stendhal talks all the time of love without distinguishing man's way of loving from woman's. This distinction is necessary. These two ways of loving are so different—indeed it could be said without much risk of error so opposite, or so inverse—that all the misunderstandings, all the clashes, all the deceptions in the matter of love proceed just from this cause, and that all the social precautions with which civilized humanity has surrounded love are designed just to avert or to palliate the dangers which arise from the thoughtless union of two beings born to love each other and each loving in a way almost unintelligible to the other. It still remains for somebody to make the book of love which will note with exactitude the resemblances and differences

[1] Amour xxii.

[2] *Ibid.* xxiii.

between man's love and woman's, and which will explain, among other things, why the most happy unions are usually those in which one loves and the other is loved, the different ways of loving not being at variance in this case. This is the book which Stendhal did not write, and of which he did not seem even to have had an idea; and now we see quite well why, after all, his book can be reduced practically to a theory of the effects of the imagination upon love. It is that, in their ways of loving, man and woman have really only one thing in common—the intellectual attitude.

Everybody will notice also, now that Schopenhauer is better known, that Stendhal in his book has shown in certain respects the *how* of love but has not shown the *why*. Why does one love precisely this or that man or woman and not some other? If this fatalistic character of love could be explained the correct solution would be found to the problem of "love at first sight." But how can it be explained? How can it be made to seem less strange? Certain it is that Stendhal did not trouble himself with this question. It is probable that Schopenhauer has said all there is to be said about it—at any rate, for some time to come. But it must be admitted that, until Schopenhauer, no moralist, as far as I know, has been so bold as to attempt even an explanation of this problem.

Finally, *Of Love* is in parts quite charming, heavy and often obscure in style, as all Stendhal's writings, sometimes rather pedantic, but ingenious and suggestive; and it has enriched the French language by giving to it an amusing metaphor, which is an exact translation of a correct idea.

IV

I will say a few words about the political ideas of Stendhal, although I share the general view of them, that they are of no consequence. I think it will be seen that they put the finishing touches to his portrait. Stendhal is a Liberal of 1820, admirer of the 1789 Revolution, half Bonapartist, half Orleanist, in favour of "two rooms and the freedom of the Press," and a violent enemy of popes, Jesuits and priests. This does not

constitute him a particularly original thinker. But at the same time he is an artist, or at least quite a distinguished dilettante; and this embarrassed and troubled him in his political opinions. And at the same time he is an epicurean, a sensualist, a passionate virtuoso of elegant leisures and delicate high life: and this also caused his political opinions to be painful to him sometimes, and made him capricious. Of course, two rooms and freedom of the Press are necessary; for they will overthrow government by priests and Jesuits. But two rooms and freedom of the Press mean popular government, and popular government will put an end to, and prevent the revival of, all that is elegant, voluptuous and artistic in life, these things being essentially aristocratic. This is very embarrassing. Stendhal visualizes the impending invasion of life by sadness. To-morrow life will be sad in France, just as in England, in the same way as in America. It will be sad because, if one wants to be worth while, one will have to court filthy-handed workers and horny-handed peasants, to drink in taverns liquors very different from the " punch and rum at half after midnight," to talk in a loud voice, to flourish stupid phrases, to lose very quickly all refinement and the art of delicate thought. It will be sad because one will have to be moral, which is a nuisance, or pretend to be moral, which is even a greater nuisance. The people like one to be moral, or rather do not like one to enjoy oneself, and do not vote for those who trifle. It will be sad because the need for morality, merely to give an appearance of dignity and gravity, will be imposed upon these French people, who even yesterday were so gay, so charming. Already in 1829 " our young men of twenty seem to me to be about forty. One would say they hate women; *they seem to dream of founding a new religion.*" It will be sad because the Revolution destroyed society life in France for ever. The Revolution established civil war in France as a permanency. Since the Revolution the government—that is to say, not speaking abstractedly, the big or little offices, the distinctions, the favours, impunity for the guilty, tranquillity and security for the innocent—is reserved for those who are members of the numerically largest party. To be the biggest party, to preponderate, to win at the elections, this is

the aim to which all the minds throughout the country are directed all day and every day. The winning party intimidates, terrorizes, ruins, shows each member of the opposite party that he is lost if he remains there; the losing party hates, jeers, calumniates, menaces, and consumes itself with "impotent hate" until it comes to change places with the winning party; and he who does not wish to be of either party is treated as an adversary by winners and losers alike, both equally annoyed to count him a dissident and one vote the less for themselves. This is social life. It is dreadful everywhere, but chiefly in the small towns, so charming in the eighteenth century and quite uninhabitable in the nineteenth century. "The Frenchman who used so to love speaking and talking of his affairs is becoming unsociable. . . . The dismissals of the Villèle Ministry have entirely broken up society life at Cahors, at Agen, and Clermont and Rodez. Fear of losing his little position has led the bourgeois to make his visits to his neighbour less frequent; he goes less even to the café. Fear of compromising himself causes the Frenchman of thirty to spend his evenings reading with his wife. The French are no longer the same people who used to want to laugh at and be amused by everything."[1] One must take refuge in Paris if one wants to be fairly free to be quiet and gay.

Stendhal saw very well these inconveniences of modern society, and he bewailed them with all his heart. However, as a good Liberal, he sticks to "the two rooms and freedom of the Press," and so he finds himself in an awkward position. Personally, he gets out of it by travelling endlessly or by living in Italy. Actually this Liberal flees from Liberalism and its consequences by taking refuge at Sienna or Civita Vecchia. There, and for a good reason, there are no politics, or at least no politics in which one is forced to take part. There, politics is a Government and some conspirators. Between these two there is a big indifferent mass, which has the right to be indifferent and not to wear a rosette on its coat. This is where Stendhal likes very much to live; this is how he personally avoids a difficult situation.

In theory, however, he never gets over the difficulty at all.

[1] *Promenades in Rome*, 22nd December 1828. Cp. *Scarlet and Black*, xxxi.

All his life he liked the government of the two rooms, and he found that under such government a country necessarily became sad, yet he never tried to resolve this contradiction. This is interesting, in the first place, because it reveals in Stendhal much perspicacity and cleverness as an observer, and also because it puts the finishing touch very well to his portrait. Stendhal belongs to the eighteenth century—I mean, in so far as its aspirations and ideals were of a low standard. But he represents 1770 transferred into the middle of the nineteenth century, where he can see whither his dream is leading and observe it in course of realization. That sort of thing always makes one change one's tune. The eighteenth century wanted to get rid of the moral aristocracy upheld by a strong government which repressed the instincts of the good natural law. If this were destroyed a sweet gaiety would spread among men. It succeeded, and the alliance of the Throne and the Altar disappeared. But since a government of some sort is necessary, absolute government was succeeded by alternative government by the most numerous—that is to say, by the party struggle; and this does not spread any gaiety nor establish any pleasant abandon in a country. There is nothing frolicsome about democracy. The two rooms and the freedom of the Press were the best that could be found to prevent the re-establishment of the Church's authority; but they did not by any means establish freedom of morals and joyfulness in human relationships. Stendhal must often have asked himself: "What is the use of it all then?" In a similar position, it is Voltaire, much more discerning than Stendhal, who found the right solution. He did not look to political liberty to bring about a laxity of morals; he frankly longed for an irreligious and elegantly immoral despotism. This, at least, is well conceived. And it is to something similar that Stendhal himself comes back when he is moved by, and more than ordinarily despondent about, the sadness of modern France: "Instead of gaiety and a thirst for amusement you will find in France enviousness, reasoning and beneficence (sad things), economy and a great fondness for reading. In 1829 the gayest and happiest little towns are those in Germany which have a little Court and a *young little despot*." In this he

betrays himself, and betrays the secret of his love for small towns in Italy to us. But ordinarily, divided between his two tastes for the Liberalism of 1830 and the licentiousness of the old régime, and distressed at not being able to reconcile in modern times liberty and licentiousness, he remained embarrassed and ambiguous. Stendhal's sociology is lacking in sureness; it is also lacking in conclusions; and I think we will do best to leave it alone.

V

Stendhal's literary ideas are about as confused as his political ones. The first thing which *strikes* one about them, in the literal and violent sense of the word, and which calls for observation, is their strangeness. Be it out of taste for paradox, or fantasy, or extravagance of mind, Stendhal delivers literary opinions so surprisingly unexpected that it is sometimes difficult not to stagger under the blow of them, even when one is used to the most extraordinary ideas in these matters. For example, he will tell you that Molière depicts a society which no longer exists—an assertion which can be upheld in a way, but his reason for it is singular. The reason is that "Alceste, not daring to tell Oronte that his sonnet is bad, gives to the public the detailed portrait of a thing he has never seen and never will see." This is astounding. He will compare Molière to Aristophanes and will call attention to Molière's laugh, "that bitter laugh imbued with satire," to show how Aristophanes laughs without bitterness and with no hint of satire: "Aristophanes amuses a society of light-hearted and lovable people who looked for happiness in all ways." In the matter of literature and art all ideas are possible; but however, such special ones as these give one a moment's surprise, and there must be readers who have asked themselves whether Stendhal had read Molière and Aristophanes, and if he had read one of them, which of the two was the one he had not read. He will tell us that it is the civilization of the salon which has given to the world the Abbé Delille, and this is a likely opinion; but he will add that "later it is mistrust and comparative solitude which brought forth the odes of Béranger." It is at least uncommon to find

in Béranger's odes the traces and effects of comparative solitude.

There are endless literary judgments of this sort scattered through Stendhal's works. They are not the least attractive thing in his works. They are exhilarating. I would like to believe that his desire was merely to exhilarate, but I do not believe so; on questions of literature and art he is exceedingly serious. As a matter of fact, his literary opinions are mostly dictated by his character, which, as we know, was very unpleasant, and they are violently scornful of almost everything. He liked Shakespeare, chiefly because he loathed French classical literature; in his youth he was quite fond of the sixteenth-century French writers, and these are all he liked. He abhors the seventeenth-century, he profoundly despises Voltaire and Buffon, and when he arrives at the nineteenth century he has not a good word to say for anybody. Chateaubriand, whom he does not in any way distinguish from Marchangy, gives him convulsions; Lamartine is hollow and empty; Victor Hugo exaggerated, ridiculous and "somniferous"; Vigny "dismal and silly." All these writers have two faults which Stendhal cannot pardon: one, that they had—or affected—religious sentiments; the other, quite probably, that they had talent or success.

The amazing thing is that, in spite of all this, Stendhal thought himself romantic, and heralded the romantic movement in his famous *Racine and Shakespeare*. But, on consideration of his definition of romanticism, and the ideas which he develops therefrom, it will be seen that, if he was really anything, it was just the contrary of romantic, in spite of what he says. It happens quite often that, in trying to explain how one is this or that, one shows quite clearly that one is nothing of the sort. Here is Stendhal's definition of Romanticism: "*Romanticism* is the art of giving to the people literary works which, in the current state of their habits and beliefs, are capable of giving them the greatest possible pleasure." Thus, for example, a type and perhaps the ideal of the romantic, is Pigault-Lebrun. Why? Because in 1820 he is read at Perpignan: "Among us the popular Pigault-Lebrun is much more romantic than the author of *Trilby*. Who is there in Brest or Perpignan who reads *Trilby*?"

One has only to explain oneself, with clear definitions illustrated by precise examples, and one is soon understood: and now we know what is Stendhal's romanticism.

It is the contrary. It is realism. It is the art of yielding to contemporary "customs and beliefs" in such a way as to reproduce them, and in so doing to amuse the public. Consequently, in the seventeenth century, romanticism is Boileau and Molière, Bourdaloue and Bossuet, La Bruyère and La Fontaine; in the eighteenth century it is Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. In a word, romanticism in each period is the literature of that period, and classicism is the literature of the preceding period, which was romantic in its time but is no longer so because it does not respond to the current habits and beliefs. And the whole of literature is thus romantic and classic by turns, passing from romanticism to classicism with time.

There is just one exception, however. If a literature, in a period of declining faith, dares to be religious, if, too, it likes to feed on and get its inspiration from ancient legends, if—as, for example, in the nineteenth century—it is infatuated with religion and the ideas of the Middle Ages, then it will be pre-eminently anti-romantic. And so the only literature in France which was not romantic was the romantic school of 1820.

The extraordinary misconception which made of Stendhal an apparent advocate of the 1820 romanticism can be explained. He had no love at all for this school; but he meant by the name exactly what it did *not* mean, and he upheld the name just because he detested the ideas.

Still, it is strange that he should have taken this word to describe something other than what everybody else meant by it in 1820. This is owing to his very confused views of the contemporary literary movement. He calls at random everything romantic which belongs to the new literature, everything which in 1810 does not belong to the French Academy, and he goes on to put confusedly together men who have no sort of literary relationship. Here is a list of *Romantics* drawn up by Stendhal in 1823: "Lamartine, Béranger, de Barante, Fiévée, F. P. G. Guizot, Lamennais, Victor Cousin, Général Foy,

Royer-Collard, Fauriel, Daunou, Paul-Louis Courier, Benjamin Constant, de Pradt, Etienne, Scribe." This is enough to show that he understood nothing of the question.

This lack of understanding is seen clearly also in his little book on *Racine and Shakespeare*. Let us leave aside the actual words of his principle of romanticism and say that, after laying down that in principle what *is necessary* is a literature conforming to the contemporary tastes, customs and beliefs, and presenting Pigault-Lebrun as the model to be copied, Stendhal proceeds to suggest as subjects for poems by the 1820 generation " a *Henry III.*, a *Death of the Duke of Guise at Blois*, a *Joan of Arc*, a *Clovis and the Bishops*." Really, where are we? Is the necessity for realism—under the name of romanticism or some other name?—or is it for a literature inspired not by the present but by the past, feeding on history, putting before the eyes of the living the customs, beliefs, tastes and habits of the men of the past? The truth is that Stendhal is no more apt with ideas than with words, and that *Racine and Shakespeare*, apart from some pages on Shakespeare and apart perhaps from a theory, very controvertible but interesting, of " the perfect illusion " in the theatre, is an obscure and painful rambling of a mind almost incapable of exposing a general idea, even in literary criticism, and, perhaps, of having one.

At bottom he is a realist, and did not like imaginative literature in any form. If he liked Shakespeare, obviously, from the way in which he speaks of him, it is first because he finds in Shakespeare's works his beloved " energy " ; but chiefly because he finds there evidence of deep and penetrating observation. His criticism, on Regnard's comedies as well as on Voltaire's tragedies, is always : " That does not depict characters." To depict characters, and to do so by " little facts " very clear, very exact, very detailed, for him this is the whole of literature. He is perfectly right in considering that this ideal has been realized by Shakespeare. Shakespeare did many other things ; but it is certain that, above all, he did this, and in masterly fashion. If Stendhal did not recognize the same quality in Racine it is, firstly, because Racine is French, and then because Racine has gained general admiration, two things which Stendhal

pardons with difficulty; and finally, because Racine, not to mention his genius, has too much talent for Stendhal. One would not say that Racine dissembles the depth of his observations, but at least he uses his talent as dramatic author not to make a show of it, not to betray it violently, so that, especially if one does not want to do so, it can happen that one does not notice it. Racine is a Shakespeare who hides himself, who rather shuns the light, who does not impress a trait too deeply, or emphasize his effect, who likes rather to leave his reader to guess; and many, though Stendhal does not believe it, need a psychology which leaves things to the imagination.

In depicting a character, Stendhal finds that there should be added to the little fact a sort of local colouring, for which he has a very happy expression and which he defines very well; it is "the originality of place." By this he means not the easy and common local colouring which gives us a general idea of the place where the events in question occur, but the art of choosing, of inventing, a limited and definite place in harmony with the things depicted, which depicts them in fact and puts us in the necessary state of spirit for understanding them well and feeling them strongly. Andromache and Pyrrhus must not be shown to us in just any room. I suppose it should be near Hector's tomb. Our French authors are lacking in "originality of place." "Originality of place seems to me abandoned in France." (He ought to have thought of *Athalie*, which is a beautiful exception.) Shakespeare's instinct for "originality of place" is admirable. "The terrace in *Hamlet*, the grotto where Bellarius receives Imogen, the castle where swifts make their nests in *Macbeth*, Romeo in the garden talking to Juliet at her window by moonlight." This is not a discovery, although written in 1804, since Voltaire had already recognized this truth and had made many efforts to record its progress; but it is a wise observation, whose precision is increased by the invention of a new and very just expression.

Stendhal as literary theorist, then, was a realist without knowing it, a lover of psychology and adorer of Shakespeare as a painter of passions; further, a man quite unmoved by any poetry and even by lofty eloquence, both of which he considered

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as insupportable declamation; finally, a man of such very limited perspicacity in the matter of the literature of his time that his examination of it consists of the most extraordinary mixture and conflicts of misinterpretations and nonsense.

You will be wondering that I study Stendhal as a literary theorist without any allusion to the theory of media, that stroke of genius which simply gave new life to the whole of criticism or, better, created it, since it was constituted a science by this theory. No, I will not mention the theory of media; I will not quote this phrase: "My aim is to show clearly how each civilization produces its poets"; nor this one, which is, after all, odd (for I do not see what enormous differences there are between the climate of London and that of Paris, nor between the political system of Louis XIV. and that of Elizabeth): "The temperate climate and the monarchy bring forth admirers for Racine; the *stormy liberty* and *extremes of climate* produce enthusiasts for Shakespeare." And I will not try to reduce to a system the incoherent considerations contained in the *Introduction to the History of Painting in Italy*, from which one can conclude alternately, every ten lines, that despotism is eminently favourable and absolutely deadly to the fine arts. I will leave these profound views aside; because Stendhal drew no conclusions from them; because a theory is valuable and can claim fame only when it is used to explain a certain number of facts, and to group and uphold and shed light upon a certain number of particular truths; because when an author has not done this with his theory, has not verified it by these applications, and has not confirmed it coherently, one can always be quite sure that in this rudimentary state it is not original, that, therefore, there is no honour due to the author, and, on the contrary, that to have had an idea and not drawn from it any conclusions is almost a proof that in discovering it he had not understood it. This is, I believe, the case with Stendhal. He discovered, or seemed to discover, the historical literary criticism, the scientific literary criticism, the literary criticism which explains and does not judge; and in all his work they are always and entirely personal impressions which he gives us as judgments, and he never makes for us the history of his generation or an historical

elaboration of the work of art; for this I do not intend to blame him, but I want to say that his theory was only a lucky find, which neither guided nor supported him, consequently was not, properly speaking, his theory, and becomes, in consideration of him, negligible.

VI

Stendhal left two novels worthy of a place in posterity: *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*Scarlet and Black*), 1830, and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (*The Charterhouse of Parma*) 1839. The latter is a second edition of the former, corrected and, at the same time, impaired. I will deal with the former first.

Scarlet and Black is a work big in conception and significance. Its title makes its subject clear; *Scarlet and Black*—soldier and priest, military ambition and ecclesiastical ambition, one succeeding the other; warlike energy and intriguing diplomacy, the latter seeking to realize the dream of power which the former has conceived. Although vast, the title is still a little narrow for the idea of the work. I should prefer that the book had as its title its date, 1830; that is the title of *Scarlet and Black*. The century is thirty years old. It was born to the sound of arms; its thoughts fed at first upon the conquest of the world. Two things absolutely unknown to the preceding century became its two fixed ideas: the admission of all French people to all possible employments, if they knew how to undertake them; and sovereign power, even over the whole of Europe, offered to the first comer who should know how to conquer it. These things are absolutely new. They could not have been dreamed of forty years earlier. They are true; they are facts, and recent facts. The future will show that, although true, they are practically illusions however; that they are only realities to the advantage of one or two of Fortune's favourites, and that they are exceptional realities; but the future has not yet come, and, on the strength of recent facts, these things have an immense hold upon the imagination. They are profoundly corrupting. The usual effect of big historical upheavals has manifested itself: a sudden and profound demoralization. Two things have been shown to be possible: to achieve everything

and to achieve quickly. Few consciences and few reasonings resist such demonstrations. One is scarcely aware of all this, you will say, in reading the literature of 1830. It is a literature full of deep pessimism and melancholy. Be very careful. These pessimistic and melancholy writers produce many volumes from their pessimism, and often express their melancholy in big poems. They are very active from a literary point of view; that means that literary ambition has replaced in them warlike ambition, which has been forbidden them; and hence arise favourable circumstances which induce everybody—poets, historians, novelists and professors of French literature—to throw themselves ardently into political ambition. So much for the men-of-letters *themselves*. And now look at the other side: the middle classes, better-class peasants, obscure provincials, workers, all the common world, is eaten up with ambition. He who later will depict them, Balzac, will give them almost only that passion under different forms. Their social ideas, if they are worthy to be called ideas—hate of the clergy and hate of the nobility—arise only from impatience against these two obstacles, or remnants of obstacles, which they believe still prevent them from having access to everything. Their only political idea, which they are to realize in the middle of the century, universal suffrage, is only the same fixed idea: that it is possible to attain to everything, and that it is possible to arrive quickly.

The aim in *Scarlet and Black* was to show to us the effect produced by these restlessnesses, these impatiences, these desires, in a passionate soul united to a superior intelligence. It is the novel of the century. Julien Sorel saw the Empire in the sense that he was brought up by a captain who served under Napoleon. Regret for this time, when one could be a general at thirty, and when one was treated as *an emperor* in France or, at least, a king in Sweden, formed all his thoughts during childhood. From regret he quickly passed to ambition: for he is energetic and, in the end, all the paths to success are not closed; but it is an ambition of a particular character, special to that period and one which many young people must have had between 1815 and 1830. All the paths to success are not closed;

but those which remain are devious. One can no longer achieve things by warlike energy; one achieves by intrigue—that is to say, an energy made up of presence of mind, sustained application, obstinate prudence and ingenious fraud. This is doubtless a fine field of activity, but it is humiliating and mortifying. Certain souls, under the old régime and under the new, find themselves completely in their natural element there and do not have any qualms about it; but the man "born to be a colonel under Napoleon," while resigning himself to such proceedings —for one must succeed: it is a duty—will be so ashamed of them that he will hate furiously those whom he will be forced to use as stepping-stones to success—that is to say, all his benefactors.

This is the man of the century, or at least this is Julien Sorel. His is not a wicked soul. He likes the people of his class, if only they were not entirely brutes. He likes his companion, the wood merchant. At one moment, in conversation with him, he gets away from blessed mediocrity and feels himself tempted. He has not a vulgar soul; for one moment, in the mountains, as the day is slowly drawing to a close, he feels himself intoxicated by the penetrating charm of the solitude, by that exquisite enchantment which is nothing more than the liberation of the soul, and he becomes for a quarter of an hour a veritable Chateaubriand in America. This boy, a plebeian with delicate skin and beautiful burning eyes, would be a Rousseau of the Charmettes under the Revolution and the Empire. But now that is out of the question. We are in 1818. A mad hope has run across the world. Each plebeian believes he has, wants to have, or is furious at no longer having, his marshal's truncheon in his knapsack. Julien's soul is neither wicked nor vulgar; it is depraved. He wants to succeed, cost what it may, and he hates from the bottom of his soul those who come between him and his aim. He detests them for preserving a state of society in which he is forced to treat them with respect in order to succeed, and to be a hypocrite in order to carry out his profession of aspirant. If he finds his Madame de Warens he will detest her while loving her, will make her suffer while giving her happiness, and, above all, will see in her a conquest flattering

to his angered and embittered vanity. If he finds a girl from the leading classes, as proud as he, whom he loves and who loves him, the love between these two will be a terrible drama, in which each, from the moment that his love is declared, feels that he is giving himself away and is humbling himself, dreads the other's pride, immediately reproves himself and regains possession of himself, endures and causes to be endured all the tortures that pride can inflict upon love, and thus passes in turn through all the agonies of humiliation, revolt, " impotent hate " and satisfied hate.

It is a magnificent character, profoundly true and admirably shown up into its very depths; a true character of an individual truth and, at the same time, representative of a whole epoch, nay, more, of a whole class at any time that a violent social upheaval shall have opened up to it all hopes of success without removing all the obstacles in the way.

The detail is even more beautiful than the general conception. Certain scenes, by their moderation, by the clear, dry way in which they are sketched, by their energetic and rather broad precision, are marvels of psychological analysis and what might be called moral dissection. Julien in peasant's clothes meeting Mme de Renal at the gate; Julien *wanting* to take Mme de Renal's hand in the garden; Julien in the café at Besançon; Julien preparing his nocturnal visit to Mlle de La Môle and scaling up to her window as one would go to storm a fortress; all the struggle of pride between Mlle de La Môle and Julien—all these are exquisite passages, of surprising depth and, at the same time, perfect clearness, one of the triumphs of that " moral literature " of the French, so curious, so learned, so expert, so incisive, which has perhaps no other rival in the world. How well they know themselves! How well they know their fellows! When one thinks that Stendhal could not bear Racine!

There are things that are bad in this masterpiece, bad and incomprehensible. It is easy to understand the love of Mme de Renal for Julien. Mme de Renal has not loved; she is thirty; Julien appears; she feels the need to protect him against the dull arrogance of M. de Renal; she talks gently to him; she entrusts her children to him; the children are fond

of Julien; so the chaste and perilous intimacy is established. It is much less easy to understand the love of Mlle de La Môle for Julien. The proud Mathilde in love with this little secretary, son of a sawyer—this will pass; and confessing this love to herself—this too will pass; but, throwing herself into the arms of the secretary—no, this is too much!

Stendhal, singularly discreet in this carefully thought-out work, felt the objection and tried to forestall it by explaining Mathilde's feelings. For this he must first be congratulated: most novelists just neglect to tell us, or to help us to guess, the *why* of the loves of their heroes. Joan loves Peter, they will tell us at great length: and they give us the adventures of Peter and Joan. Stendhal explained at length why Mathilde loves Julien. But his explanation causes surprise. Why does Mathilde love this passionate plebeian? It is precisely because he is plebeian and because she feels he is passionate. At least he does not resemble the others, the insipid young men who surround her. Perhaps he is a Danton. "Could he be a Danton?" Here is why Mathilde loves Julien. And then comes a very clever and extremely interesting analysis of intellectual love, love through the imagination, and that sort of love which places a living person in a framework prepared long in advance by a series of dreamings, meditations and idealizings. The analysis is good: but it does not elucidate Mathilde's case. Mathilde's pride is aristocratic pride, and Stendhal has marked it with traits so strong that no mistake can be made about it; Mathilde's pride and admiration are all for her ancestors, the La Môles, who were beheaded under Charles IX. and Louis XIII. And therefore the adolescent dreamings which prepared her for love will most certainly be, will have to be, peopled by figures of great men of action, with high ambitions, but always gentlemen, great lords. It will never enter her head that a plebeian could be a great man. So, if she falls in love with a plebeian, it will not be as a result of her previous dreamings, as a result of the preliminary working of her imagination: there will be some other reason. In other words, Mathilde must not be made to experience intellectual love, love through the imagination, but, on the contrary, quite another sort of love, sensual or

sentimental, for example, counteracting in her all the work of her imagination, as well as of her education and her prejudices.

This mistake gives something artificial and forced to the beginnings of the love affairs of Mathilde. Stendhal wanted to make a study of intellectual love; he chose a poor example.

It must be added that, as soon as Mathilde's love has been declared and is considered as an accomplished fact by the reader, when there is no further question of the struggle between her pride and her love, then the work is admirable.

The ending of *Scarlet and Black* is curious, and, in truth, a little more false than is permissible. The impression of a French reader of 1900, or even of 1860, is that at the conclusion of *Scarlet and Black* the characters lose their heads. You recall the situation: Julien has become the lover of Mlle de La Môle, and Mlle de La Môle is with child. This is not all; as favourite secretary of M. de La Môle, Julien has been made confidant, accomplice and servant to a political conspiracy—which, by the way, is the most complicated and annoying thing in the world. However, Julien is absolutely master of the situation: he holds all the forts. M. de La Môle, weak and very sensitive to the coaxing of his daughter, cannot but resign himself to accept Julien as his son-in-law. And, actually, he is made gradually to resign himself, to furnish Julien with a noble title and an officer's commission; Julien is getting on. Suddenly something happens to put all these people in an extraordinary state. A married woman writes that Julien has formerly been her lover. From that moment all is broken off, ruined, hopeless. Mlle de La Môle exclaims and writes: "All is lost!" M. de La Môle does not want to hear anything more about it, nor to resign himself to anything; he takes back all that he has given; he becomes implacable. Julien, the impeccable aspirant, the man of appalling coolness and imperturbable will-power, is the most mad of them all. Really, he only needs to wait. However curious the effect produced by Mme de Renal's revelation upon Mlle de La Môle, M. de La Môle will have to recover his composure and face the necessities of the situation. All Julien need do is to wait. He does not wait. He rushes straight to Mme de Renal and shoots her dead with a pistol.

I say that everybody loses his head without any reason. First, Mme de Renal. If necessary, she might be made to denounce Julien in an access of jealousy. But no, she is made to do so in an access of devotion. On the part of a woman not only very much in love, not only very generous, but rendered very intelligent by love, and who has employed superior diplomacy to extricate herself from the business of the anonymous letter in the first part of the novel, this proceeding, done from such a motive, is absolutely incomprehensible. It could never have entered the head of Mme de Renal: it only entered the head of our anti-clerical Stendhal. As for M. de La Môle, he becomes very suddenly puritan and foolish; and Mathilde very suddenly hopeless; and Julien very suddenly distracted. They are none of them any longer recognizable. Herein is a condemnation of the author.

I believe that I see the reasons for this extraordinary weakness at the end of a story conducted up to that point with so much skill and such understanding of truth; and I believe there are two reasons for it. First, we are in 1830, and, however much Stendhal wants to be impervious, there is nobody, especially when it comes to writing a novel, who is not influenced by the fashion. Now in 1830 a novel might accord with truth as far as its ending, exclusively. In its ending at least it must be romantic—that is to say, adventurous, extraordinary and, generally speaking, tragic. The sweet George Sand herself, up to 1850, always contrived at the end of her lovable and graceful stories a touch of the melodramatic. At the time when Eugène Sue was being read, and famous phrases from *Mystères de Paris* were freely being used in conversation, a lady said to me: "I read George Sand only as far as the blows *at the end*. They spoil her for me." From 1830 to 1850 every novel had to have at least blows at the end. Another reason, more important, is to be found in Stendhal's character and the twist of his imagination, such as we know them. Stendhal is, on the one hand, a man who likes truth and knows how to distinguish it; on the other hand, he is a man who adores "energy," and we know what he means by an energetic deed. In writing *Scarlet and Black*, or, rather, in composing it in his mind, his observant instincts

and his psychologist's tastes were completely satisfied, but his idolatry of "energy" was not. He saw Julien Sorel, patient, persevering, discreet, tenacious, bold when necessary; but not at all *energetic*—that is to say, giving a good stab in the Italian fashion. And he must have despaired at sight of him proceeding towards a bourgeois ending, towards success, a fine marriage and a regiment or legation. This conclusion, since up to that point the novel had been so good, was the true, almost the necessary, inevitable conclusion. But it distressed Stendhal. It was painful to him to think that his dear Julien could not kill somebody, could not do what a Lafargue had done. So as to make Julien into a Lafargue, Stendhal threw into disorder and spoiled his whole novel. He switched it completely off its proper track. So as to give Julien a chance to let off a pistol, or a pretext for doing so, Stendhal suddenly changed the characters of Mme de Renal, of Mathilde, of M. de La Môle and of Julien. The cult of energy caused Stendhal to say many stupid things and, in this case, made him do a stupid thing.

This is much to be regretted. It puts an accidental ending to a "true" novel. The two real endings to *Scarlet and Black* from which Stendhal had to choose were these: either Julien could marry Mathilde, with her father's consent, and become gradually, very quickly even, a violent aristocrat, implacably hard upon his inferiors; or Julien could marry Mathilde against the father's wishes, and drag her down into the depths, where they would both become envious, bitter, rebel "déclassés." The novel, in either case, would then have had the complete and deep significance which it lacks, or rather seems to lack, and which its actual conclusion hides and causes us to forget, instead of confirming and bringing it forcefully to our notice.[1]

[1] What is curious is that this unlikely ending is a true fact. Julien Sorel existed. (See *Impressions d'Audience*, by Michel Duffléard (1828), noticed by M. Casimir Stryenski in the *Revue Blanche* of October 1880; also the article "Le prototype du roman *Le Rouge et Le Noir*," in the review *Art et Critique* of 25th October 1880.) Julien Sorel was a little seminarist called Antoine-Marie Berthet. He had been tutor in the family of a lady named Michoud, at Brangues (Isère). He had been her lover. He had then gone to the house of the de Cordon family, on the banks of the Rhone. He seduced a daughter. A child was born. A marriage was to have made amends for this fault. This is at

Scarlet and Black is, however, a great work, worthy to have been, like most great works, practically overlooked when it first appeared, and to have earned the attention of posterity like all works, even stupid, which are based on a big and universal truth.

The Charterhouse of Parma is a kind of counterfeit of *Scarlet and Black*. The general idea and the characters are similar; the setting and the scenery are different; but the general idea is presented with less force and the characters are, so to say, blunted and filed down, while the thoughts and descriptions are given in less relief. It is a second test for ideas that are already well worn. *Scarlet and Black* is the story of a young ambitious Frenchman of 1815, *The Charterhouse of Parma* is that of a young ambitious Italian of 1815. The young Frenchman became an enthusiast for Napoleon, and drank in the "Napoleonic spirit" by talking with a soldier of the Empire; the young Italian, son of one of the victors of Marengo, witnessed the last effort of the Empire and fought at Waterloo. What happens to the one in France at the time of the Restoration is *Scarlet and Black*; what happens to the other in the Italy of the Holy Alliance is *The Charterhouse of Parma*. Both have their protectors, M. de La Môle and the minister Mosca, who are extremely like each other; both at twenty have lady friends of thirty, Mme de Renal and the Duchess Sanséverina, who at least as lovers are exactly alike; both fall in love with young women, Mlle de La Môle and Clelia Conti, who, I admit, do not resemble each other but who have one thing in common, that they are both disappointing and conventional, one as an aristocratic French beauty, the other not much better than a German sheep, for Stendhal, who did admirable portraits of the women

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least one version of the incident. Berthet always asserted that he had had nothing but honourable relations with Mlle de Cordon. At any rate he suddenly left the de Cordon family, returned to Brangues and discovered that Mme Michoud no longer had the same feelings towards him and that possibly he had a rival. He wounded her in Brangues church by shooting her with a pistol, with which he afterwards wounded himself. He was condemned to death and executed. As often happens, Stendhal has taken a true fact, and, keeping it for the end of the novel, has prepared for it psychologically and circumstantially in such a way as to render it illogical and false as a conclusion, even if it be true as a fact.

of thirty, was not so sure of himself in those of the young women.

The basis, then, and many details are the same in these works. *The Charterhouse of Parma* is remarkable for a kind of obliteration or deadening of everything which can be felt after reading *Scarlet and Black*. Like Julien, Fabrice, after his warlike enthusiasm, determines upon an ecclesiastical career and upon following the devious ways of intrigue, thus becoming a hypocrite and a diplomat after the style of Cardinal de Retz. But, as a member of the aristocracy by birth and protected by the mistress of a minister, he does not have to make the same effort as Julien, nor to express the same feelings. In him there is no tension of the will, none of the passion of envy, hate and defiance. Hence he has no significance, or more truthfully one would say he has no character. With Julien it is the difficulties of his struggle and his remoteness from his goal, combined with his ambition, which make his character. Julien is all the time active; Fabrice is almost passive. All sorts of things happen to him; but what is interesting is what people do, not what happens to them. The greatest fault of *The Charterhouse of Parma* is this extreme insignificance of the principal character and the little interest he arouses.

On the other hand, the Duchess Sanséverina is a vigorously drawn and impressive figure. She is energetic and clever, clumsy also, and imprudent at the beginning of her success, by reason of those two very feminine characteristics of too much self-confidence and hastiness. This young Agrippina does great honour to Stendhal. The trouble is that the author has right at the beginning put Fabrice too much in the limelight as leading actor in the piece, and thus it is rather difficult for us to turn upon the Duchess the interest which we expect Fabrice to arouse and which he scarcely ever does.

Another trouble which is of little importance to most readers is that the part of the Duchess is morally of very little significance. What is the meaning of this Duchess and all her doings? That beautiful and intelligent women have an immense place in monarchic societies? Of course, this is true, but it is of no particular interest now. For us there is more attraction in such

themes as the coming of the plebeian classes, their effort to succeed and the feelings which accompany this effort.

Finally, just as everything is duller, less spirited, in *Chartreuse* than in *Scarlet and Black*, so the conclusion is flatter, duller. It must be added that it is truer and better satisfies our logical instinct. In *Scarlet and Black* everybody goes mad; in *Chartreuse* everybody is resigned. The Duchess, still loving her nephew, gives up the life of intrigue and, sweet and melancholy, goes off to live in bourgeois comfort at Naples with her minister, who gives up his ambitions. Fabrice, become a Bishop, is steeped in the gloomy calm of a love-habit, a bit furtive and shameful, which is like an old man's liaison.

This ending is very interesting for the study of Stendhal, both as a novelist and as a man. We are in 1839 now and not 1830. As a man, Stendhal seems less attached to his dear "energy," to his bursts of violent and unbridled passion. As a novelist, in spite of all the picaresque or chivalrous adventures with which he has filled *Chartreuse*, Stendhal inclines more and more to realism. This ending to *Chartreuse* at least is entirely realistic. He seems to be saying to us: this enthusiasm, these big hopes, this frenzy for greatness, this Napoleonic spirit, so general after the great crisis of the European upheaval, where are they going to end in the near future? In resignation, in the tranquillity of a bourgeois life, monotonous and selfish. This story begins with the heroic escapade of the young Fabrice at Waterloo and ends with the cautious, discreet and regular adultery of Mgr Fabrice del Dongo with Mme Clelia Crescenzi. And so are the lives of all of us. We all have our escapade at Waterloo to begin with, something similar to the bishopric of Parma to continue, until we make for ourselves a "chartreuse" in solitude and silence at the end.

The Charterhouse of Parma, less powerful and deep than *Scarlet and Black*, is, however, a distinguished work in parts. It contains that admirable picture of the battle of Waterloo which has become classic as a true account, as vividly impressive and spectacular as the *Enlèvement de la Redoute*; it contains a sketch of the "Court of Parma," very living, very lively and in fine relief; and it has an ending powerful and sober and true in its

melancholy. It is annoying that half the book is unreadable. All Fabrice's adventures after the murder of the comedian, and then the whole of Fabrice's stay at the citadel, bore the reader to death. In these are a very marked absence of invention and a most cruel monotony. There was nobody with less genius for writing an epic than Stendhal. Little significant facts of a state of mind, details of habits, studies in psychology—this is where he excels. Away from these he sinks to an indifferent level.

VII

Stendhal was very little valued in his time. The big public ignored him. The scholars, and among these his friends, never took him seriously. Sainte-Beuve, really a rather bad judge of his contemporaries for many reasons, found him amusing in his rôle of a freak and detestable as a novelist. This is fairly easy to explain. In my opinion, he was right in the case of everything but *Scarlet and Black*; and so far as *Scarlet and Black* is concerned, it must be remembered that Sainte-Beuve had written one of his own. In *Volupté* he had sketched the portrait of the young man of 1830 as he saw him; and this portrait is so different from Stendhal's that it is not surprising that Sainte-Beuve could understand nothing of Julien Sorel and found him false. Balzac exclaimed in admiration when *The Charterhouse of Parma* was published; but, on reading his eulogy of it, it is obvious that he does not seem even to know *Scarlet and Black*. He talks of Stendhal's preceding works as "twenty extremely ingenious volumes." Mérimée, a personal friend of Stendhal, consecrated a little study to him which, if I am not mistaken, some have considered as a eulogy, and where Mérimée, with cruel thrusts of indirect irony, actually represents his old friend to us as a rather grotesque idiot.

It was not until 1850 that some very expert scholars noticed that Stendhal was worth anything. They made for him a reputation as thinker and moralist, and even as critic, which began by being exaggerated and has been on the increase almost into our own times. This is easy to understand and is not without reason. It was not just an ordinary caprice of fashion; it was not just

a chapter in the history of literary prejudices. In the first place, Stendhal is a moralist; in this capacity he is narrow, ordinary, often bad, but he is a moralist. Now, for a hundred years there had not been a moralist in France. Since the eighteenth century, in France, there had been writers who sang of strife and who produced imaginative elegies and lyrics. Men brought up on Bossuet, Racine, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, and even Duclos, greeted Stendhal as a friend. They had been waiting a long time for him. It is they who made his first reputation for him. Whatever Sainte-Beuve may have thought, or whatever he may have suspected, he and Stendhal were admired by the same crowd, who enjoyed *Volupté* and liked *Lundis*, and *Scarlet and Black*.

Another reason for his later recognition is that Stendhal was a realist. He is that essentially, in spite of his taste for " energy " and for stabbing. He did not always succeed in painting true characters, but he wanted to do so and did not always fail. He knows how to see and to observe; he can analyse. He has the essential gift for doing this; he can come out of himself and enter into the head of another, seeing something there, often very distinctly. In this respect the creator of Julien Sorel, Mme de Renal and the Duchess Sanséverina is the earliest of our realists. He is more correctly so than Balzac, who was able to observe, but rather as a visionary, and was a realist still encumbered by the clumsiest and most vulgar sort of romanticism. He is more correctly so than Mérimée, who, it is true, was almost free from romanticism, but was a realist who always had, either from timidity or some other cause, a taste for letting his observation go astray, for showing us customs always in some way rather foreign and to a certain extent incapable of assimilation by us. In *Memories of a Tourist* and *Scarlet and Black* Stendhal had the audacity, or the sincerity, or at least the originality, to present to us average French customs, average characters born of our soil and shaped by our history, at a particular date, without the violent exaggerations of a too crowded brain, without in any way discreetly changing, cleverly displacing and ingeniously ignoring the perspective. In the decline of romanticism, in the unjust but fatal disgust which

followed about 1850 upon half-a-century's fashion, Stendhal appeared justly as the most anti-romantic of the whole romantic, lyric and elegiac epoch. This lingerer from another epoch became, as naturally happens in the play of literary actions and reactions, a herald, and a realist school came into being just in the nick of time to enable him to become its ancestor. Thus his impermeability was rewarded, as he had foretold, though without expecting much from it. And if to these facts you add that his ideas and irreligious tendencies, so out of place in the period in which he lived, were not at all scandalous or unacceptable to the people of the second half of the nineteenth century, who had, as a matter of fact, other reasons for enjoying them, then you will understand this phenomenon—not uncommon in literary history—of an author much more widely read, and especially much more admired, by the generation after him than by his own.

Considering him without further reference to his inclusion in or exclusion from any particular school of thought, Stendhal remains an eminent figure in the history of our literature. He represents the eighteenth century, among such as Duclos, Helvétius, Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis; a man dry of soul, intellectually bright, positivist in his turn of mind, and of a rather coarse sensuality. But he represents the eighteenth century—how shall I say?—perverted, or rather hardened, and rendered more brutal by the Revolution and the Empire. The eighteenth century, even at its dryest and most vulgar, had its little glimpses of the ideal which must never be forgotten. Positivist, sensualist, believing only in material happiness and preaching only the "search for happiness"; even so, Stendhal wanted the happiness for everyone; even so, he *dreamed on behalf of humanity*; even so, he saw before him an era of prosperity and sweet voluptuousness which he thought he was preparing for all men and which he invited the whole human race to share. Stendhal's only belief is in sensation, though he does not think that it is within everybody's reach. He is an epicurean without having the hope or nourishing the dream of universal epicurism. He seems always to say: "Seek happiness, do not seek anything else; there is scarcely anything else."

In a word, he belongs to the eighteenth century but lacks its optimism. He represents an eighteenth century which has passed through a terrible period of brutality and violence, which has been hardened and saddened, and which has kept all its ideas without its dream. Hence the dryness, the hardness and the gloom of all the work of this lingering Holbach. Hence comes Julien Sorel, "who is not the equal of Valmont"—I mean who is worth even less—whose leading idea is that life on earth is a search for pleasure, and that pleasure is reserved for a small number of very strong, very energetic and very implacable egoists. The dream of the eighteenth century was *the establishment of happiness*; Stendhal's idea was *the search for happiness*, which quickly became *the struggle for happiness*. Here is what Stendhal, grandson of M. Gagnon, and creator of Julien Sorel, did: he transformed by a touch of his hand epicurean optimism into pessimistic epicurism.

From the more particular point of view of literary history we have already seen how important Stendhal is. It is quite true that he is the restorer of realism in France, and certainly if the realist school of 1850 had not existed he would have had less fame; but all the same he would have had his merits. He would have remained isolated in history, as he was, indeed, in the literary world of his time, as representative of an art which is French *par excellence*—that of examining those around him, of taking stock of them and of creating one or two characters which reproduce them faithfully, but are more compact, more alive, more striking than the originals. This was a lost art which he found again. If he had been alone in practising it, all the more would it be necessary to mark him out and honour him. But since he came before Balzac, and did it better than he—by which I mean with less power but more truth—since he came before Mérimée and as writer is infinitely superior to him—though less keen as observer—he was the restorer of a style that was to be of such importance in the century that literary history has in him not only an object for study, but one of its most important, most essential turning-points. One can dislike him; one can laugh at him. He lends himself to each of these two forms of hostility. He is unsympathetic as a man, very dry and very pretentious.

He is ridiculous first for his great pretentiousness, then for his hint of ingenuousness, and, finally, for the extreme narrowness and limitation of his general ideas. But he is original, he is quite himself. He observed and saw certain things well. He is loyal, sincere and conscientious in his profession of observer. He has taste for the truthful detail, seen close at hand and faithfully reported, and he gave back to us this taste which we had lost in some extraordinary way. That shows that he was fond of truth, and for this a man is always worthy of respect and recognition. And Providence keeps a reward for those who love truth. To Stendhal she gave the gift of writing " some infinitely ingenious volumes," as Balzac said, and above all, perhaps, the most solid, the fullest and the most lively novel which was published between the appearances of *Adolphe* and *Mme Bovary*, as a reward for his having thought and said " that a novel is a mirror wandering along a highroad."

TOCQUEVILLE

TOCQUEVILLE

A Liberal patrician, with a passionate fondness for liberty and a fairly precise sense of the meaning of that word; on the other hand, so convinced of the inevitability of Democracy in modern times that he accepts it absolutely and is only concerned to reconcile it with the amount of liberty it will bear; very intelligent; conscientious in his work beyond all words; a good historian, a good observer, and not far from being a great writer; here is a very interesting character. And it will be good to determine his chief characteristics before the march of his beloved Democracy and of his detested democratic customs has quite obliterated him from memory.

I

A PATRICIAN he certainly was. There never was a man more disdainful of others than this grandson of Malesherbes and son of a Restoration official, and yet he never wanted to take his nice title of viscount and always signed himself simply "Alexis de Tocqueville." In him were strongly pronounced the qualities and faults of vanity. He devoted himself with an exalted, feminine affection to those whom he had once chosen to be of his intimate circle and to be his equals, whether they were nobles or workmen, be it noted, but for the rest of the world he had the highest contempt. His *Souvenirs*, which, it must be remembered, by the way, were written when he was not only embittered, but ill, are full of a proud and really painful bitterness, even for the reader, at the expense of a crowd of men, who, though they were not all perhaps notable, were yet almost all very worthy. He was timid, a certain sign of pride, as modesty is of merit. Tocqueville was modest and he was also timid. He himself admits that, while he was a member of the 1848 Constitutional Commission, occupying an extremely important confidential post, which he owed to the good sense of his colleagues, his part in its proceedings could be summed up in the following dialogue: "You didn't do anything there at all?" "Nothing." "Nor said anything?" "Almost." "Why?" "Insupportably uncomfortable. There was one man who was a bore and another who was cunning." "As on all commissions." "And the bore prevented me from expressing my ideas; while the cunning one took advantage of the fatigue which the bore produced in us to

put through one by one, at the end of the sitting, the motions which he had framed beforehand. It would have been necessary to baffle the one's cunning and to subdue the bore. I left things alone." "At bottom you are lacking in firmness." "In the presence of idiots." "Then you were not made for public life."

It is true he was not. He was earnest and reserved, made for meditation and solitary work, and would lose his wits in front of a crowd, or rather had not the right sort of talent to cope with such a situation. He knew this and could say so very nicely. The following is a clever portrait, probably of Thiers, and certainly describing what Tocqueville was not: "The basis of a party chief's duty is to mix continually with his own men and even with his adversaries, to spend his days meeting people and going about among them, to cultivate that flexibility which enables him to put himself on a level with all intellects, to discuss and to argue incessantly, *to say the same thing a thousand times in different ways and to show a perpetual interest in the same things*." And he goes on to depict himself, surely: "Of all this I am profoundly incapable. To discuss things that do not interest me is disagreeable to me, and it grieves me to discuss those which interest me very much. Truth is for me a light which I fear to extinguish by disturbing it. As for associating with men, I can only do so in an ordinary and general way, because I know so few of them. *If a person does not strike me as having something rare in his mind or feelings, I do not notice him, you might say.* I have always supposed that ordinary people, as well as talented ones, had a nose, a mouth and eyes, but I have never been able to fix in my memory the particular form of these features in each of them. I am always asking the names of these strangers I see every day, and I am always forgetting them. However, I do not despise them; I treat them as commonplace. I honour such as these because on them the world depends; but they annoy me exceedingly."

This state of mind gave him the uncomfortable habit of retiring within himself or within the circle of his chosen friends, other separate entities, which only those who are reserved themselves can understand and of which only those who are unreserved are unaware. "In me there is an instinct which leads

me to retire within myself, even when I must find sad thoughts there. Very possibly pride is at the bottom of this. . . . My daily tasks help to prevent me from being overcome by universal contempt for my fellows." He is distinguished from the mere adorers of their *ego* by what he discovered when he retired thus within himself; it was a rather weak being, very easily dissatisfied with himself, conscious of his deficiencies, very desirous for his own improvement, and fearful of not being able to extract from himself all that he had hoped for. "Restless . . . anxious . . . disturbed. That comes from dissatisfaction with myself. I have a restless pride, not envious, but black and melancholy. It shows me continually all the qualities that I lack and makes me despair at the thought of their absence."

His soul, pure and earnest and sensitive, was of the type that readily withdraws itself, which is so sure it will suffer when it opens out that it feels hurt beforehand; and yet eager, rather as though ever drawing nearer to its home. Intellectual activity was for him a dominating, inward need, an incessant demand of his nature. It is rather amusing to see how indignant he is because one of his friends, intelligent, rich, leisured, does not write a book: "For me it is something quite phenomenal to find that a man with so many ideas as you, and often quite new and quite profound ideas, should never have tried to make a great work which should place him and fix his name in the memory of his contemporaries and of posterity." M. de Kergorlay cannot see why it is necessary to write a book because one is intelligent, nor why, because one has ideas, one must expose them to those who do not understand them. For Tocqueville this duty exists, and it is a genuine duty; for he does not believe very much in the influence of ideas upon the destiny of humanity, especially nowadays. "We have entirely ceased to be a literary nation, as we were in a high degree for two centuries. . . . The influential classes are not those who read. Therefore a book does not disturb the public mind, nor could it even for long attract attention to its author." However, one must think and one must write. It is "proper" and it is "pleasant." "I see no more fitting or agreeable occupation in life than the writing of true and honest things which can bring

their author's name to the attention of the civilized world and can serve, *if only in a small way*, the good cause."

And, as he said himself towards the end of his life, this is a natural necessity for certain types of mind, especially for those who, shy of action and nervous in discussion, need, however, activity; need that sort of activity, regular, unyielding, extremely energetic, but not disturbed, not interrupted, not rendered incoherent by intelligent or impassioned objection, which is carried on with the forehead in the hands, the finger and thumb in documents, or the pen in hand in the encouraging and strengthening silence of the study. This continued effort was, for Tocqueville, the health of the soul: "The most fixed principle of my mind is that there is no time in life at which one may rest. Effort is just as necessary as one grows old as in youth; indeed, much more necessary. *The great disease of the soul is coldness.*"

He had not much to complain of in his too short life, for he lived mostly in accordance with his principles—that is, with his nature. For some years he was a magistrate; he visited America and produced a very fine book as a result; for about twelve years he was a highly respected Member of Parliament; although he had opposed the candidature of Louis-Napoleon, he became a minister under his Presidency; after the *coup d'État* he retired into private life and published his admirable work on *The Old Régime*; very soon after he fell a victim to lung trouble and went away to Cannes, where he died at the age of fifty-four. Not long before his death he had quoted somewhere this saying of one of the philosophers of old: "Suffer death patiently, with the thought that you need not part from men who think as you do."

Our classic writers would call him "generous"; his soul was loyal, pure, devoted to big purposes, very courageous, very disinterested, capable of all the tenderness of family feelings, and of friendship for obscure friends—that is to say, of true friendship, very disdainful, the result not of self-esteem, but of that wonder which is inspired in lofty natures by those who are ordinary in mind and soul: and in his case his disdain is not exactly aversion, but a sort of bewilderment and awkwardness

in an unknown country. A certain solemnity which he put into his writings, but which is not noticeable in his letters, has done him some harm. It came to him from the days of his magistracy, and from his nervousness, and was a mark of respect for his public which others too often fail to pay. He disgusted those downright idiots who think themselves wits; it is a double success which only serves to flatter him.

II

His methods were loyal and scrupulous as his soul. He detested the sort of work which comes easily and, consequently, such things as facilitate work—that is to say, thoughts at second hand and general ideas.

He had both fear and hatred of documents at second hand: "When I want to treat of a certain subject, I find it practically impossible to read any of the books which have been written on the same question. Contact with the ideas of others disturbs and troubles me so much that reading their works is painful to me." Here is to be seen the conscientious police magistrate who went to live in America in order to study Democracy; and also the man who all his life was upset and somewhat paralysed by discussion. Some writers like books which others have written on the subjects with which they themselves deal, because they get ideas from the discussion to which such books give rise. But such discussion hinders Tocqueville in his ideas: it disturbs them without inspiring them. He is a man of personal reflections and patient deductions.

It must be admitted that herein was a fault, which accounts for the relative coldness of his books. In a work by Voltaire or Diderot, or even Montesquieu, the author is the centre of a group of thinkers, or people who believe they think, with whom he argues, discusses, yields, replies, comes to terms, and struggles: "If a thing is granted to one of you, how can I be expected to permit another of you to talk and another, who goes farther still, to hazard an opinion? . . ." Thus the book becomes a dispute, well regulated by him who writes, which means that without being necessarily well composed, it is alive.

To take into account the ideas of others is a courtesy, if you like, or, if you prefer, a sacrifice; but, above all, it is a resource and an art, and is one way of preventing a book from becoming a monologue.

As for general ideas, they are so inevitable and so dangerous, so necessary and so formidable, it is so evident that the object of work is to acquire them, and that they are adopted in order to shorten labour, and it is so clearly a mark of mediocrity not to have them and a mark of intellectual laziness to be too easily content with them, that it has always been impossible to tell whether they should be more a cause for rejoicing than complaint, whether they should be rather encouraged or discouraged. Tocqueville, like all other people, adopted them towards the end of his investigations, and committed no crime, by any means, in establishing for some of them a very honourable place in the world; but, be it said in his praise, it was after having been extremely mistrustful of them. It would not be too much to say that he was afraid of them. He lived, too, at a time when both in France and in Germany they were being terribly misused. They were for him *idola intelligentiæ*, both fascinating and deceptive. He saw in them particularly temptations too easily inducive to laziness. "They do not bear witness to the strength of human intelligence, but rather to its insufficiency; for there are no two people exactly alike in nature; no facts identical; no rules applicable indiscriminately and in the same way to several things at once." "M. de La Fayette said somewhere in his *Memoirs* that an exaggerated system of general principles brought wonderful consolation to mediocre public men. I would add that it is also admirably consoling to mediocre historians. It furnishes them always with some strong arguments, which readily help them out of the most difficult part of their book and favour the weakness or laziness of their mind, while doing honour to its depth." This is really why he detests exceedingly, as we shall see, considerations of climate, of the general march of civilization, of race. On the question of race he is so mistrustful that he becomes epigrammatic, and so epigrammatic as to become bitter: "Others would say that this is a result of racial difference; but it is an argument that I can

admit only in the last extremity and when there is absolutely nothing more for me to say."

He sees at the bottom of this perilous play of ideas that historical fatalism to which all imaginative historians have more or less fallen prey, since Polybius and his historical "mechanism," which Fénelon gently derides. Tocqueville does not believe at all in this *anankè*, and analyses very ingeniously the turn of mind which leads him to make this admission. He thinks its adoption is sufficiently explained by the fact of never having been mixed in public affairs: "I have lived with men of letters who have written history without taking part in affairs, and with politicians who have been concerned only to produce events without thinking of tracing them. I have always noticed that the former saw in all things general principles, while the latter, living in the midst of disconnected daily occurrences, readily fancied that all things must be ascribed to particular incidents. It is conceivable that they are all mistaken. For my part, I hate these arbitrary systems which make historical events depend upon big first principles, bound together by a fatal chain, and *suppressing, so to speak, the men who have made the history of the human species.* . . . I believe, without desiring to offend those writers who have invented these sublime theories to nourish their vanity and facilitate their work, that many important historical facts could be explained only by accidental circumstances and that many others remain inexplicable, while, finally, chance plays a great part in the spectacle presented by the world's theatre. But I also believe firmly that whatever happens by chance has been prepared in advance. Former events, the nature of institutions, ways of thinking, the state of customs, are the materials from which chance composes these impromptus which astonish and frighten us."

In other words, Tocqueville has not and does not want to have any historical philosophy. He sees general causes, he sees particular ones, he sees accidents—that is to say, facts—which, by reason of the circumstances in the midst of which they are produced, from the moment of their birth, give rise to consequences much bigger than themselves; he sees other accidents, which are called men, who might easily not have existed, who

were, or who became, by reason of their genius, tremendous causative forces with extraordinary consequences, and who thus produced series of events which might not have happened and which owe their existence indisputably to chance—in a word, he sees in history necessity, probability, unexpectedness, the impossibility of anticipation, and accident, things which make the construction of a historical philosophy risky; and he always refused to take this risk.

Finally, then, what was Tocqueville? A very cautious sociologist, much more a sociologist than a historian, and a man who, although he knew history very well, almost eliminated the purely historical element from his sociology. By this I mean that the accidental and semi-accidental, the casual element in human facts, what can hardly be foreseen and cannot possibly be gauged beforehand, are precisely what he called history, and hence comes his desire not to investigate laws and not to believe that laws exist or can be drawn up. But beneath history, counteracted no doubt or favoured by it—more fixed however, and stable—does there not exist something permanent, the customs of a people, the institutions (such as are modelled on these customs), customs which in their turn have been influenced by institutions of very long standing; and this permanent basis, very slow in evolution, has it not also its history, which pursues its course beneath that of the more variable and varied history proper, more calmly, more smoothly, more surely and, consequently, in a way more capable of being foreseen and written about in advance? This seemed probable to Tocqueville, and the task which he set himself was to penetrate beneath accidental history to solid history, or beneath history to the physiology of peoples.

Thus he was a historian of institutions or a demological historian. This was quite new at the time when he attempted it —that is, in 1833. Between the history which was too hampered by philosophic considerations and the purely epical history, and again, the history which was not much more than a pamphlet and a controversial work, there was decidedly room for a patient, and at the same time impassioned, study of this underworld, of these depths, of the bottom of this sea upon which

pass the currents, the ebb and the flow and the tempestuous agitations of the waves of living. This was the task to which Tocqueville applied himself. Notice how he was prompted to this study by his nature; meditative, reserved, as little man of the world as man of the platform, he was well made to pay little attention to surfaces, to probe the depths and listen to the silences and to hear best of all the things which make the least noise. Let us examine what he heard or thought he heard.

III

One single big sociological fact struck Tocqueville: the establishment of Democracy in the whole civilized world. In the light of this fact he studied characters, sought causes, foresaw consequences. We will follow him in three inquiries.

Tocqueville never defined Democracy, but he made it everywhere apparent what he meant by the word. To him it is the need which man feels, not by any means to suppress government, but to suppress hierarchy. What annoys man is not the fact of being governed but of being dominated, so to speak, menaced; not of having to obey but of having to respect; not of being restrained but of having to bow down; not of being a slave but of being inferior. This sentiment is neither good nor bad; it is natural and it is eternal. Human society never entirely complies with it but, precisely for this reason, man's efforts in this direction are continuous. Institutions have so much power that they create sentiments; societies are always hierarchical, and when they have been vigorously so, it has happened that the idea of hierarchy became a sentiment with man, counterbalancing the democratic sentiment, and at such a time, social hierarchy, urged on first by its necessity and then by an unnatural, though traditional, inherited and sound sentiment, was never so strong. But all the same the anti-hierarchical sentiment has always existed and the chief social contradiction is precisely the contrast between the necessity for hierarchy and the sentiment for equality. Men then experience the need, not to destroy government—man is naturally an *archic* animal—but to destroy and weaken, as far as lies in their power, all the

deputy governments, all the authorities, castes, classes, corporations, which come in layers between them and the central government. What they commonly call Liberty is no other than this thing. The subject in an Oriental empire thinks he is free; the Roman people hailed Cæsar as a liberator. It is noticeable that peoples never, or very slightly, lavish a religious respect upon a caste, but very often and very easily do so upon a single master, an Oriental despot, a Roman Cæsar, a French Napoleon. He represents for them popular force incarnate in one man. In what way then does he represent it? By suppressing hierarchy, which popular force always wants to suppress. In this way he represents not, it is true, the people itself, but one of the people's instincts, and the keenest of them, in a state of victory. Therefore the people is not entirely mistaken in seeing itself represented by him. Despotism is very truly democratic.

To be sure, there are less clumsy forms of Democracy; there is Democracy without a despot. This is despotic itself and in spite of itself. There is no need to conceal this fact. Even in the United States of America, so dear to Tocqueville for reasons which we will see later, there exists, in some respects, a despotism which is very troublesome: "When a man or a party suffers an injustice in the United States of America, to whom do you think he must appeal? To public opinion? It is public opinion which forms the majority in the legislative body. This latter represents the majority and obeys it blindly. To the executive power? This is elected by the majority and is used as its passive instrument. To public force? Public force is nothing more than the majority under arms. To the jury? The jury is the majority invested with the right to pronounce judgments; the judges themselves in certain states are elected by the majority. However iniquitous and unreasonable be the measure which hits you, you must submit to it."

Men, if they had (but they had not) the intention, by establishing Democracy, of founding Liberty, would be very much mistaken. The essence of Democracy is not at all to abolish despotism, but, on the contrary, to be attracted to it. Democracy does not establish Liberty, but, as Tocqueville admirably expresses it, "It immaterializes despotism." Under Democracy,

despotism is everywhere, but is not perceptible anywhere. It is not in a particular man, a particular temple, a particular senate, a particular caste, it is in the very body of the nation as a whole. It is the nation, represented by its majority, which binds you and imprisons you according to its will. Democracy is not the art of bursting chains but the art of being mutually enchained. Democratic despotism is subtly diffused through all the air which the nation breathes. It does not fall from above, it does not exactly rise from below, it surrounds us, encircles us, and creeps around us on all sides. One is tied down by all one's neighbours. Without any joking it must be said that this is a great consolation; for despotism, by force of being impersonal, comes at least to be anonymous. To be oppressed is to be oppressed; but to be conscious of oppression is, above all, to be able to name one's oppressor. When this name is pronounced, by specifying one's affliction, one becomes conscious of it. It is not widespread suffering which is hard but localized suffering. By the suppression of hierarchies, democracies increase the amount of government but diminish the pain of being governed.

They have other advantages. In general they are very conservative. Born out of a relative equality of fortunes, they maintain and increase this equality, which they like, by all the means within their power: progressive taxation—that is, the taxation of riches, the tightening up of death duties, a wife's dues on her inherited fortune, children's dues on their future fortunes, are favourites among democratic principles. Thus they create a middle class which is so large as to form a half of the nation. They diminish the rich class and the poor. The class which they thus create is an extremely conservative one, with a horror of revolution and even of any change, which, incidentally, gives added strength to despotism, but decreases the strength of the revolutionary army which all nations possess. Democracy will always be so far conservative as to retain quite patiently things remaining from old régimes which are against its principles. This view, which has received since the establishment of universal suffrage in France a confirmation so striking that it can boast of having become common, was as original as possible

when Tocqueville expressed it. At that period universal suffrage was considered to be revolutionary. What would have been revolutionary is suffrage that was widespread but not universal, bringing in the question of capacities. The stroke of genius for a Guizot would have been to jump from aristocratic suffrage to universal suffrage, passing over the capacity stage: he would have found himself in the same situation as before—if anything, less disturbed. But who was to know that? Tocqueville, at least, foresaw it and said so.

Democracies are also and for the same reasons very pacific. First, they do not like changes, and a big war is a vast change throughout the social state; then, they do not like war because they like neither victory nor defeat. Defeat is fatal to their interests and victory to their prejudices. Defeat is ruinous and disturbing to all the interests of the middle class for one or two generations. Victory creates not only a chief, a state of things to which Democracy can adapt itself, but a hierarchy, which is its contrary. It militarizes a nation and disposes it from top to bottom, according to the military hierarchy; it even creates for a time, maybe quite long, a caste, the warrior caste, which is a thing insupportable to a democratic nation. Democracy, then, is just as pacific as conservative. It will allow, if absolutely necessary, commercial wars, distant wars—maritime in nature like those of Carthage—but wars for territorial extension, no; these are made by monarchs or powerful aristocrats. Tocqueville did not develop these ideas—and I have put my own in here—but he indicated them.

Finally, according to Tocqueville, democracies permit and develop a certain gentleness of manners. When a nation is divided into classes, each develops solidarity within its ranks and thus prevents the nation from becoming a united whole. These classes create within the country so many camps which regard each other angrily, or at least with animosity. The suppression of classes, relative equality of conditions, make man sympathetic to his fellows, because they are in like position to himself. Since sympathy for others is, first of all, a matter of self-examination and then of consideration that other people are beings like oneself, it can exist only if other people are visibly

similar in nature to oneself. It is just this consciousness of likeness which disappears or is forgotten when a people is divided into classes. Democracy is thus favourable to good will among men. The French Revolution had a sort of intuition of this when, after destroying classes, it inscribed the word "Fraternity" upon its device.

Here Tocqueville seems quite simply to make a mistake through a strange oversight. He thinks of classes and not of parties. In the change from aristocracy to a democratic state, parties replace classes, and there is not less violent hate between the former than the latter. Indeed, it is more violent. Classes despise each other or envy each other—they do not exactly fight against each other, or at least not all the time. But parties are constantly at war for power. Hatred is endemic in democratic states. This is so true that, on the one hand, politics become in the middle and lower classes under Democracy the art of mutual hatred; while, on the other hand, abstention from politics, even feigned, becomes a sign of good-heartedness. On the one hand, men of combative temperament naturally turn to politics, and on the other those who want it to be understood that they are peaceable, tolerant and inoffensive people, hold aloof, or pretend to do so, saying: "I have no interest in politics." Since all states have their faults, the truth is that the citizens are much less disunited under despotism than under popular government, and that Democracy is a civil war in little—mild, soothing, preferable to others, but all the same a civil war, fairly animated and permanent. Under despotic monarchy the attitude is, "Let us obey and help each other to bear the yoke"; in civil war it is, "Let us fight each other"; under Democracy it is, "Let us count our numbers instead of fighting each other." This attitude is very reasonable, but before, and during, and after, the counting no opportunity is lost of showing ill-feelings.

This flattering section of Tocqueville's picture of Democracy is, all the same, very interesting, and quite true as a whole. At the time of its appearance it had especially the piquancy of paradox in the light of recent events. To characterize Democracy as pacific, as conservative, as gentle-mannered, to men to whom the word Democracy meant unquestionably the Revolution and

who could hardly visualize Democracy under any other form than the Revolution, was to arouse interest by provoking contradiction. A certain courage was needed to do this. Paradox is just a game for ordinary men of letters; but in M. de Tocqueville's world it has a bad effect and is not permitted.

Herein must be recognized Tocqueville's principal virtue, that he had the courage of his ideas. When he returned from America, where he had seen Democracy characterized by certain things which it had never had in France, he risked being accused of exaggerating to attract attention by reporting quite frankly what he had seen, and even added that Democracy would have these same characteristics anywhere where it should be solidly established. Except for a few details he was so far right as to be, even for France, a very good prophet. It is now half-a-century since Democracy has been established in France, either in its Cæsarean form or in its Republican form. During these forty-six years it has been conservative; it has not made a revolution, not one, since the Empire collapsed of its own accord without attacks from within; it has suppressed, with unexpected resolution, will and coercive force, the revolutions which minorities have tried to make; it is even, perhaps, too resistant to progress, to the somewhat laborious attempts to change; there is no more solidly or formidably conservative instrument than universal suffrage. It has been extremely pacific, and was rendered warlike only by deception, or rather, war was made on its behalf against its will, when it said that it was not at all in favour, and by taking advantage for warlike purposes of the approval it gave to its Government to keep the peace. After a pacific aristocracy there is no more naturally pacific government than a democratic one.

Tocqueville did not conceal the inconveniences which he believed he discovered in Democracy any more than he did its advantages. I believe he is quite the first person who said that Democracy lowers the intellectual level of governing bodies. Very generally accepted nowadays, this idea was absolutely unheard of in Tocqueville's time. Montesquieu, not really very democratic, had said: "The people is admirable at choosing its magistrates"; and it was fairly natural that his opinion should

be general. It is so evidently to a group's interest to choose only its devoted servants, and also so evidently to a whole people's interest to choose only the most intelligent men, that it seemed merely a question of common sense that Democracy should return to power only the chosen intellects of the country. Tocqueville saw in America that this is not at all the case and that practically the contrary is true: "I was astounded to discover how common talent is among the governed and how often it is lacking in those who govern."

He found various explanations of this fact, all, in my opinion, quite just, all very original and prophetic at the time when they were given. In the first place, Democracy is jealous of intellectual superiority, and especially of the affectation of such superiority. As Stendhal very happily said: "Difference engenders hate." That is not absolutely true. Difference engenders astonished and semi-religious respect—or it engenders hate. Now the advent of Democracy suppresses respect and leaves room for the other sentiment. It must never be forgotten that, properly speaking, classes never disappear. Castes disappear but classes remain. A class, under Democracy, is a maimed caste, which has lost all that made it respected and kept all that made it different; consequently, all that made it capable of hatred. Therefore, when a cultured man comes among uncultured electors, they are right away prejudiced against him, at least in one respect. He is, relatively to them, of another order and, so to speak, another nature. As a matter of fact, if the ordinary elector has little taste for the cultured candidate, he has likewise scarcely any for the candidate belonging to his own class. The ordinary elector scarcely ever appoints his equals. In such a case he is moved by the argument, "Why he rather than I?" which bears enormous weight with him. But what happens, and it is very serious, is this: in his desire not to elect men of a superior class, and not to elect men of a humble class, the elector in democracies elects men of no class. He very willingly elects a man of superior class who has been rejected by his class or has not been able to make his way there. He is rather liked because of the aversion which this suspected class has shown for him. This sort of *cross-breed* is the scourge of democracies.

He is poor without having the pride which is common to plebeians; consequently he is always ambitious, often mercenary. He is an intriguer, a brazen-face and a charlatan. He is much less conservative than those who elect him, very willing to make innovations, having nothing to lose, essentially a party man, having no personal ideas or fixed principles, very dangerous, rarely useful, and sometimes, for all sorts of things happen, a man of genius momentarily astray, capable of rising very high and of becoming unexpectedly a great statesman, owing to his independence of class. But he is essentially accidental. He it is who gives to democracies the external and superficial appearance of a troubled and tumultuous character which they do not in any way fundamentally possess. In this way, out of these calm and pacific masses, arises, under the name of national representation, a political world which is feverish, quarrelsome, vexed by a thousand intrigues, convulsed by a thousand passions, changing its ministry every six months, not in any way truly representative of the country, and wherein the real country, dumbfounded, cannot at all recognize itself. Democratic jealousy is the most serious of the vices from which democracies must preserve themselves.

Here it must be added that democracies can scarcely be blamed for their so-called liking for mediocrities. It is not so much that they like mediocrities as that they find it rather difficult to recognize real merit. Montesquieu is wrong: the people is not admirable at knowing men, because to know men is the most difficult thing in the world. You must not expect or suppose that the masses have the qualities of a psychologist or of a moralist. "What long study, what a variety of elements are necessary in order to gather an exact idea of a single man's character! The greatest geniuses go astray, where the mass succeeds! The people never have the time or the means to devote themselves to this work. They always have to make hasty judgments and fasten on to the most striking features. Hence it is that all kinds of charlatans know so well the secret of pleasing them, while more often than not their true friends fail to do so."

It is just here, I would like to add, that that similarity, so amusing and so often observed, between Democracy and absolute

Monarchy ends. Like despotism, Democracy is despotic; like despotism, it is capricious (in its choices, not in its ideas—despotism is capricious in both); like despotism, Democracy is unjust, proud and ungrateful; like despotism, it likes only those who flatter it; but it has the disadvantage of liking its flatterers without knowing them. There is only one despot, but Democracy is composed of some millions of heads; therefore the despot knows his favourite and has plenty of time to study him; Democracy, however, has favourites which it chooses before judging them, keeps without studying them, and abandons before having known them. It must not be concluded that this makes a great difference; for, if despotism and Democracy have an equal liking for incompetent people, and despotism has the apparent advantage of realizing its favourite's incompetence, it must be noticed that the prince, although he has seen through his favourite's mediocrity, keeps him none the less, while Democracy, without having had the time to perceive its favourite's mediocrity, no longer keeps him, and rejects him for his inadequacy in favour of another.

Finally, Tocqueville did not fail to observe that one reason for the invasion of democratic governments by mediocrities is that men of worth have an extreme aversion (which is excessive and entirely mistaken) to canvassing democracy. They know and exaggerate its faults. They are very willing to lose contact with it. They get quite used to being ruled by it as they are by the weather, by consulting the thermometer, the barometer and the weather-vane, without claiming to exercise any influence upon these instruments. "This thought has been very naïvely expressed by the knight Kent. The well-known author whom I mention, after highly praising that part of the Constitution which grants to the executive power the appointment of judges, says: 'It is probable after all that the men most fitted to fill these posts would be too reserved in manners and too severe in principles ever to be able to muster a majority of the votes in an election under universal suffrage.' This was printed without contradiction in America in 1830."

Such are the chief ideas on Democracy which Tocqueville set out with true and profound impartiality in his fine work,

Democracy in America, during the July Government. This book, which was very suggestive and well deserved its reputation, has the single fault of being too full and too comprehensive. Tocqueville is so concerned, and really so obsessed, with the idea of Democracy that he records in this book all that he saw in the United States of America, and attributes to the existence of Democracy on American soil anything characteristic or striking, or even ordinary, that he finds from Boston to New Orleans. The turn of mind, the way of speaking, education, family habits, characters, artistic tastes, many other less important things, all these are considered by Tocqueville as so many effects of democratic government, and as phenomena which must be reproduced, or are almost necessary, wherever democratic government is established. He took into account only one cause, and treated all that he saw as an effect of it. He ought to have overcome his horror of theories of race and climate a little, and especially to have considered the national character independently of institutions and customs, and the traditions preceding the democratic constitution, foreign to it without being hostile, and existing beside it without having to owe their lives to it. It is surprising and rather amusing to find in this book, destined to show what Democracy makes of a people, chapters on : " General ideas and why the Americans show more aptitude for them than the English " ; " Americans' susceptibility, small in their own country and big in ours " ; " Democracy modifying the relations between master and servant " ; " Democratic institutions tending to shorten the duration of leases," etc. Truly there is but little connexion between these various things and democratic government. Tocqueville had many notes and he wanted to put them all within the framework of a study of Democracy. In his notes he had material for two works, one on American life and the other on American Democracy. He ought to have written both separately. In the foregoing pages I set myself the task of picking out the purely political part of the work and setting it out summarily. It really is, however, a very powerful work, very acute, full of views which were new to his time, and have since been almost all verified with an exactitude which leaves room for reflection.

IV

The Old Régime is the counterpart, and, one might say, the counter-proof, of *Democracy in America*. The latter is an analysis of the democratic state, and the former is an inquiry into the way by which the French passed from the monarchic to the democratic state. *The Old Régime* was made by Tocqueville, like *Democracy*, by direct observation. He had travelled in America; he travelled through the old régime. He restricted his reading to archives only. He pictured to himself Normandy, Touraine and Languedoc as they were in the eighteenth century, and observed their way of living.

He had a surprise. All people set out with preconceived ideas; only those whose minds are small stick to them, whereas those whose minds are vigorous and honest either retain them or renounce them according to the discoveries they make. Tocqueville set out with this idea, very general—I must not say in his party because he never belonged to any party, but in his class—about 1830, that the French Revolution, by centralizing France, had founded, or made easy, despotism in this country; that before the Revolution there was on the surface of the nation a crowd of liberties, localized as well as corporate, which limited and obstructed the central will, and that the only work of the Revolution was to destroy all these franchises. In the presence of well-studied facts he very soon rectified these opinions, in which there was both truth and falsehood, and he made the truest and most precise rough sketch of the work of the Revolution that I know, though he did not have time to enter into the history, properly speaking, of the Revolution.

Before the Revolution there had been three governments in France: (1) a central government—the king and his council, directing France through ministers and commissioners, administering the country down to the tiniest detail, regulating it, making it serve and pay—in short, a modern government, centralizing, attracting and absorbing; (2) a feudal government, making itself felt more or less strongly here and there, imposing local slavery, taxes and particular obligations—tortures and humiliations rather than subjections—not very strong, but

embarrassing, cumbersome and irritating; (3) free provincial institutions, surviving in a certain number of places, but common only in Brittany and Languedoc.

These three governments—the one at once a product and an agent of modern centralization, the two others remains from the past—inconvenienced and hindered each other; but the first was incomparably the most powerful. French centralization had been in existence for two centuries, more solidly than in any other country in the world, when the Revolution, which is accused of having made it, came about. Only it was, and perhaps still is, in a way concealed by these remains of a feudal government and of free provincial institutions, which were entangled and entwined in it; and, according to the point of view one adopts and the party to which one belongs, one can say, and even believe, either that the France of 1780 was still terribly feudal, or that the France of 1780 was decentralized, autonomous, strongly entrenched in its provincial liberties, and that in this country it is Liberty that is old and despotism that is new.

The truth is that even before 1789 there was in France a sort of Napoleon, who found in his way, without being much impeded by them, here seignorial rights over a small area, there provincial liberties of no great power—that is, a government which met on its path the remains of two governments which were collapsing and going completely to ruin. Actually it is true three can still be counted.

The Revolution came along and, in the presence of the three governments, set to work to destroy the two which had no force and to strengthen the one which was already almost all-powerful. It took pains to overthrow the feudal government and the provincial institutions and to constitute a central government decidedly unhampered and unlimited. These were so certainly its tendencies that its first dream was "royal Democracy," its second, government by one house, and its third, the Empire.

Its conception of Liberty went no further than to place beside the all-powerful central authority an elected house which superintended and controlled it. This was an excellent precaution from the point of view of the administration of finances, and as a guarantee of liberty for the citizens; but it was bad from the

point of view of personal, municipal and provincial initiative. It was no guarantee for the rights and interests of minorities, which is the essence of Liberty; indeed, almost it was the contrary, for the parliamentary majority, the country's only representative, gave a legal sanction and apparent authority to the violences committed by the executive against minorities. In a purely political way, the Revolution did nothing more than this: of three governments, of which only one was oppressive, it destroyed the two which were not so.

Here is the theory invented by Tocqueville to explain this peculiar Liberalism; it is ingenious, plausible, perhaps a bit too shrewd, but fairly correct. The lighter a yoke, the more it seems insupportable; what exasperates is not the crushing burden but the impediment; what inspires to revolt is not oppression but humiliation. The French of 1789 were incensed against the nobles because they were *almost* the equals of the nobles; it is the slight difference that can be appreciated, and what can be appreciated that counts. The eighteenth-century middle class was rich, in a position to fill *almost* any employment, *almost* as powerful as the nobility. It was exasperated by this "*almost*" and stimulated by the proximity of its goal; impatience is always provoked by the final strides.

With all respect to this point of view, it must be observed that the Revolution was not Liberal because it is easier to go downhill than to climb up, and to make a state worse than better. France had been becoming more and more centralized for two centuries, and the chances were that any shock would turn this tendency into an accomplished fact. It was easier to continue the work of the monarchy than to try to reform it. The Revolution was based more on Equality than on Liberty because, whereas the levelling process was three parts accomplished, the application of Liberal principles had not begun. Furthermore, Liberal principles are always applied from below upwards, while the Revolution, itself centralized in its assembly and its capital, worked from above downwards: finally, Liberal principles are applied sensibly and gradually, never by revolution.

At all events, the Revolution was based purely on Equality. Its real motto was: Regularity, Uniformity; no more internal

custom-houses, no more legislative differences, no more distinction between elected and electors, no more special courts of justice, no more particular and local rights. All this amounts to nothing more than equality. Uniformity, regularity, unity of procedure and administration, this is complete equality between the citizens. It does not prevent despotism and may even favour it; but it allows every man in a country to say: "Nobody is freer than I"—which must not be considered a wretched consolation, and is perhaps the most real that man has ever found in his eternal misery.

Further, since things are never so simple as they seem at first glance, it must be observed that the Revolution, while working in the interests of Equality, may have been under the illusion that it was doing something in the interests of Liberty. By equality, regularity, uniformity, in a word by centralization, there is assured in a country a sort of individual liberty, in the main illusory—pleasantly so—but real also. In a centralized country the citizen meets everywhere the same laws, hard, perhaps, but the same; the same administration, oppressive, perhaps, but the same; thus life becomes easier, "coming and going" more convenient, and there is greater facility, less worry, and a sort of security and tranquillity in existence. This is a type of Liberty, certainly. It is not true Liberty, which consists in being one's own master, in having for oneself certain rights, so sanctioned and so protected by the class, corporation, town, province or human group to which one belongs that no central authority, no law voted by the majority of a central assembly, can deprive one of them. But, anyhow, the sort of liberty which is assured by equality and centralization has none the less practically, and even casually, a fairly enjoyable reality.

It must be remembered that the Roman citizen in Marseilles or Carthage who could cross the whole Empire and find everywhere the same code and the same forms of procedure, and administrative agents obeying the same spirit, could live all his life in the belief that he was a free enough citizen. This type of Liberty which uniformity assures was founded by the Revolution, and it was a benefit. Such was the need that was felt in 1788 that it seemed as though true Liberty had been established by

the Revolution. As a matter of fact, it was the old régime that was established. The old régime was the king-State, restrained when it was weak and granted omnipotence when it was strong, by the superintendent and controlling Chambers which were known as legislatives; the old régime was the king-State, sometimes supporting the Parliaments, sometimes opposing them by *coups d'état*; the new régime was the State-king, likewise supporting the Chambers sometimes, and sometimes making *coups d'état* against them. The Revolution established the old régime in a settled, concentrated and more uniform form, wherein, by the way, it achieved a material amelioration.

The French nation, which never wanted Liberty, but had a strong desire for Equality and Unity, understood quite well what was happening. It is surprising that in 1799, no longer anxious for Liberty, it still held to the Revolution, and that, although it wanted a leader, it would not have the old one, and even repulsed him vigorously. This was precisely, as Tocqueville showed very clearly in his fragment on the 18th Brumaire, because the Revolution was one thing and Liberty another. The Revolution had given to the French, apart from the properties of the clergy and the *émigrés*, civil equality and administrative uniformity; they meant to keep these advantages without worrying about the Liberty which they had not, and had never had. With the Empire they lost only the *Five Hundred*. It is impossible to imagine how little a nation troubles about its *Five Hundred* and how little it considers them as a source and guarantee of national liberty, which to a certain extent they are. They are too distant; they are too much of a central power in themselves; they are too incapable of assuring for the citizens particular rights and franchises which shall be their essential faculty; they are too much in themselves a centralizing government attracting to itself and absorbing. If a revolution does no more than assure for a nation national unity, equality and administrative uniformity, it is no bad thing, and is worth keeping; the only substitute for it is a single man; he can preserve these advantages quite as well as the revolution.

Here then is what the Revolution did. It finished off the centralizing process, which the old régime had already far

advanced; it brought the old régime to its perfection; it created a centralized Democracy, capable of being, without losing its character, a royal Democracy, an imperial Democracy or a republican Democracy. Whatever turn it took, and in any case, Liberty would not be assured and could hardly be tolerated by it. And if this state of society had been founded, as some think, by the Revolution, the chances are that a work so recent would even now be in decay; but, since it is proved that in this respect the Revolution was only the heir and testamentary executor of the French monarchy, do not let us be mistaken, there are two centuries and very nearly three of our history whose work we can review, and this is a fact that must be accepted resolutely and for all time, and our only aim should be to amend it.

Before examining the way in which Tocqueville thought to amend this state of affairs, let us see to what causes he attributes it and to what origins he traces it; for it is only from one's idea of causes that one can imagine remedies, and it is only by knowing one's idea of causes that one can judge if one's proposed remedies are well thought-out.

V

Tocqueville paid too little attention to the causes which have involved modern peoples in the democratic state, and this is the chief defect of both his works. In general, he thinks of Democracy as a big force *in itself* and by itself, which drives and drags modern peoples along towards an unknown or obscure goal, and he scarcely ever rises above this conception. He can say, surely enough, that the development of wealth derived from real estate, produced as a result of improvements in communication, created among European peoples a middle class which found itself one day the equal of the nobility, seeing that, moreover, especially in France, the nobility did nothing but impoverish and diminish itself. He can say that in America there has recently been implanted on virgin soil a race of equals, not containing in it any germ of aristocracy, and, moreover, maintained by its religion in sentiments of fraternal equality. But I

do not see that he goes much farther in his etiology. As a matter of fact, Tocqueville's etiology in general is cautious—for which he should be praised—but rather limited. It is curious, for example, that, when he wants to explain the French anti-clericalism of the nineteenth century, he traces it entirely to the eighteenth-century philosophy, without thinking that this philosophy was not entirely anti-religious, that it did not have a very big influence upon the French Revolution (for, if it had had, the Revolution would have been very different from what it was), and, above all, that it made a relatively small impression upon the public mind, and especially upon the mind of the masses, in the nineteenth century. Although he knows it, he does not think to say that the clergy were popular in the eighteenth century, that the clerical manuscripts were the most Liberal of the manuscripts of 1789, that, up to the beginning of the Revolution, the middle classes and the clergy marched hand in hand; but that, from the moment when the Revolution in its course wanted to reform the Church, and went so far as to persecute it, the clergy allied itself with the old régime, becoming both its auxiliary and its protector under the Restoration, and that it is from the time of the Restoration that the popular criticism of the clergy in France—which has gradually been turned into an anti-religious sentiment—dates.

These are historical causes, and it is such as these that Tocqueville naturally considers less than the others. He is much more a sociological observer than a historian, and considers rather the state of one particular period than a succession of periods.

As far as Democracy in Europe is concerned, it seems to me that he, who is always confusing it not unreasonably with centralization, might quite well have argued that it was produced out of the need which peoples experienced to be more and more centralized for the purposes of maintaining the struggles between themselves. For three hundred years Europe has been in a continual state of war. There is no people, in such a state of affairs, which does not need a dictator, and, consequently, need to destroy those particular authorities, and those local liberties, dear to Tocqueville, which are liberties within the country, but,

in relation to external action, are weaknesses. It is for themselves, it is true, but also for France, that Richelieu, Mazarin, Louis XIV., Louis XV. and Napoleon take into their hands the concentration of the French forces. It is for national defence that small countries have been regrettably merged in the big national agglomerations; through a similar phenomenon it is for national defence that local liberties in each country have been resigned into the hands of the common fatherland. In a warlike Europe there cannot but be either despotisms pure and simple or centralized and imperious democracies, and if the one resembles the other the foregoing considerations show that nothing is more natural. Europe is progressing towards despotism, autocratically or democratically organized; anything that bears a resemblance to federalism must wait for peace in order to try to find room for itself. And do we not see that the European country, dear to Tocqueville, which has remained the most decentralized and the most aristocratic, and which can even permit itself a very creditable half-attempt at Liberal federalism, is the nation which, anchored in the middle of the ocean, has less to fear than any other from the perpetual war which hangs over the whole of Europe, either as a fact or as a menace?

Modern history is the history of big agglomerations and strong concentrations for defensive purposes, and also for conquest, which in itself is a type of defence, since peoples must be strong to be masters of their country. In the course of this evolution Liberty has received some rough blows, and it will receive more yet. The principal reason is that, in this corner of the world, there are too many big nations crowded into a small space: further, that the act, as happens in all things, is not always adjusted to the need and exceeds the necessary limit, which is to say that concentration, by reason of the general movement, spreads to things to which it is not necessary, for a country's defence and integrity, that it should apply itself. This is what happens, what has often occurred in France and elsewhere, and what we shall have to bear in mind when we examine the remedies suggested by Tocqueville for combating the evil.

VI

Tocqueville's perpetual purpose was to save Democracy from centralization. He had seen in America pure Democracy under a non-centralized government. To him it seemed that, in such a state, everything desirable in Democracy and Liberty was saved and reconciled. He pursued in Europe the end which seemed to him attained in America. He wrote to a friend: "All that you tell me about the centralizing and regulating tendency of European Democracy seems perfect to me. But, after having very well developed these ideas, you add that we are practically of the same opinion. That is not saying enough. The thoughts which you express there are the most vital of all my thoughts. *To indicate to men what they must do to avoid tyranny and degeneracy while retaining Democracy*, such is the general idea which sums up my book (*Democracy*), and which will appear on every page of the one I am writing at this moment (*The Old Régime*). To work in this direction is in my eyes a holy occupation and one on which neither one's money, one's time nor one's life should be spared."

He found various different ways of decentralizing Democracy. First he invented the distinction, so often elaborated by others since him, between political centralization and administrative centralization. To the State he would give powers necessary for its existence and defence; to the province and the borough all the rest—that is, their financial administration, the exploitation of their resources, their police—free from the control and protection of the State. The State should make laws, arm, judge and receive from the citizens the necessary moneys for these purposes; the province, the district, the borough, each for itself, each in its own territory, should administer itself, order itself, maintain order within itself, instruct itself, make its canals, carry out its afforestation schemes, live an autonomous and, consequently, an active life.

This distinction, very attractive at first sight, is practically an illusion. Administration and politics have so many points in common, and so many bonds attaching them, that it is not easy to separate them. I will not lay too much stress upon the singular

disparity that such a system would establish, would re-establish, in a country like France, nor upon the differences in education, in local customs, in public spirit which would be found in passing from one province to another. After all, this disparity would not have any very great dangers, and, provided that the judicial system were the same and that the citizens were judged everywhere according to the same laws, he would not have to complain of finding different states of mind when he travelled. But when the province or district administers itself, that means that each province or district spends for itself, runs itself into debt without thinking of the others and of its country. It means that a poor district will spend only little, and a rich will spend too much. It causes a national life unequally distributed—nay, but it is always that—let us say, rather, distributed with too much inequality and, consequently, ailing and sickly as a whole.

There is no danger of this in a country like America, which does not have to make external war and which has, consequently, no *need for an intense national life*; but it is immensely dangerous in a country whose perpetual objective, whether it likes or not, is and must be possible warfare; and all the European countries are in this pass. The boroughs' money, the provinces' money, this supplies the war-chest, which must not be drained, wasted or imperilled by them. But why should they be supposed to be prodigal? They are not; they spend in accordance with their resources; but they think only, and can think only, of their own resources and needs. The State alone is the State, and can think of general needs, future perils, international complications, and, in consideration of these things, can oblige provinces to be economical, not in accordance with their need, but with its own.

In this way the most local administration is already politics, and politics of a most important and miscellaneous character in the general interest, and the distinction between administrative and political centralization is ineffectual in European countries. Tocqueville, who knows this objection, or foresees it, or is capable of making it himself, replies by quoting the example of Languedoc, a State-province—that is to say, administratively autonomous, under the old régime. It spent much money for itself, being very rich, and the central power, the king's council,

feared it and remonstrated with it. In reply Languedoc proved that a large proportion of its expenses, and the heaviest, had been incurred as much and more in the general interest, in the interest of the French, than in its own. This was true, but it does not prove much. It proves his point in the case of a large province which is a sort of intimate ally of France, a sort of Hungary in an Austrian Empire. In such a case—yet, even so, it cannot be regarded as a foregone conclusion—national and provincial sentiment can be united. But the small province, the district, the borough are incapable of this generality and comprehension in their purposes. If the Revolution, by creating the eighty-six departments, wanted to make necessary the centralization which was dear to it, then it took the best means of doing so. Can it be said that its dream and its aim should have been a France divided into five or six big provinces, administratively autonomous? If she had been made thus she would have had to be kept in that state; but, since all but two of the provinces had in 1789 already lost for two centuries this character of administratively autonomous States, it would be nothing but a purely artificial task to try to give it back to them, and, so far as the department, the district or the borough in their present state are concerned, they are agglomerations too small to have in their *administration* the *political* spirit necessary to their good conduct without protection.[1]

A further curious fact is worth attention. Democracy and centralization are so connected that the very essence of Democracy is to make centralization necessary. A town administered by its notables could, in the long run, be governed not only wisely but *politically*—that is to say, in the general interests of the nation. But, as Tocqueville very well understood, Democracy has no taste for notables, and, in a town such as that postulated, universal suffrage would not put the administration into the hands of the notables. Thus necessarily this town is invested with the right of initiative and of first deliberation, but its resolutions are submitted to the central power, with whom rests the decision and the last word. Democracy likes in general the authoritative State: but it goes farther than to like it; it makes it necessary.

[1] See my *Questions Politiques* for greater detail.

This distinction between political and administrative centralization, of which so much has been made, must then be considered as more ingenious than solid. Whatever one does, and the more one studies this question, the more one is persuaded that any sort of decentralization is always a federalism, and to both can be applied these words of Tocqueville, in which there is a great truth: "A people which, in the presence of the big military monarchies of Europe, would proceed to break up its sovereignty would seem to me to forswear, by this single fact, its power, and perhaps its existence and its name."

Are there other ways of avoiding the defects of Democracy? In truth, there are no others than those which consist in retaining in Democracy the aristocratic elements which are roughly reconcilable with it, and as soon as Tocqueville ceases to favour decentralization he becomes more or less aristocratic. First of all he is a parliamentarian, which is common to all Liberals, but which is aristocratic in the extreme, though Liberals do not always suspect this, whereas Democracy makes no mistake about it. True Democracy is direct government. Election and representation drain—for it would be impertinent to say purge—popular thought, feeling and desire before converting them into laws. Although national representation is not only open but variable, nevertheless it is an aristocracy. Once constituted, it is this representation alone which deliberates in the country, and it alone which governs. It constitutes a legal group established for four or five years in the heart of the country. Also, although it has none of the ordinary characteristics of aristocracies, heredity, traditions, perpetuity, it still remains infected with an aristocratic appearance in the eyes of the populace. The populace tries by different means, such as the imperative mandate, periodical statements of accounts, the *referendum*, to diminish its authority, and henceforth the struggle between the proletariat and the aristocracy will be continued between Democracy and Parliamentarianism.

Quite naturally, then, Tocqueville is a parliamentarian. He is so with this addition, if you like, that he wants universal suffrage functioning in two steps. Very opposed to curtailed suffrage, which creates "a little middle-class oligarchy preoccupied with its own interests and completely separated from

the mass of the people," he boldly suggested that the popular will should pass through a first selection before it arrives in personified form in the National Assembly. It seems to me that he has not explained his reasons for this. Probably, in expressing this view, he had already foreseen what is to-day proved by experience—that any election is an election made in two steps. The direct election happens in two steps. The electors are too numerous all to come to terms with each other on the question of the choices to be made. Consequently, one of two things happens, the one being used as commonly as the other in the same departments from one division to the other, throughout the territory: either, following a central appeal, delegates are nominated who choose a candidate from the party and practically impose him upon their political colleagues; or committees, mostly permanent, in the districts where the party is strongly organized, without bothering to convoke delegates, choose a candidate, adopt him and impose him as a delegation would. In each case the real elector is the delegation or committee; the election is made in two steps. Would it not be better for the institution of delegates to be regularized, for the committees—which, since they are not even chosen by the electors, are pure usurpers—to be suppressed, and for a group of people to be appointed by general consent for the purpose of deliberating and making a choice? Election in two steps is only *what happens*, what happens quite regularly, consequently giving better results, abolishing surprises, removing unofficial labels and avoiding juggling. In a country where there was one House appointed by direct suffrage and another by suffrage in two steps, it could be quite safely affirmed that the House resulting fromregularly organized suffrage in two steps would represent most precisely the country.

Tocqueville similarly wanted to save for democratic omnipotence independence in judicial powers. He had no trouble in perceiving that a judge's independence is the keystone of a Liberal system, more than the Parliament itself. And it is not far from being Liberty itself.

Since Democracy is the State-king, how will an individual be able to defend himself against an unjust encroachment by

the State and uphold against it his rights which it has wronged? Only by a justice absolutely independent of the State, absolutely determined to find the State guilty if it is in the wrong, and strong enough to decide against it in reality. This amounts to saying that the problem is insoluble. It had been resolved under the old Monarchy in an accidental way and by a shameful accident, which, as happens in our poor world, had had excellent results. At a time when property was much respected, the magistracy had become a property. The State, in need of money, had sold the right to judge. Those who had acquired this right had become an almost hereditary class, very independent owing to its wealth, possessing rights of succession, tradition, perpetuity, *esprit de corps*; in short, an aristocracy. It formed between the State and the individual an intermediate authority, which was a guarantee, naturally insufficient but very real, of Liberty. There is no better proof of the fact that Liberty can be guaranteed only by intermediate authorities—that is to say, aristocracies. In the purely democratic State there is no solution to the problem of justice. If the magistracy is appointed by the State, it belongs to it; if it is elected, it belongs to the electors—that is, to a party. In each of these two cases it is incapable of protecting minorities and individuals; it has the character either of an administrative tribunal or of a political committee, and neither the one nor the other can pretend to be a sanctuary of impartiality. It will not do for a magistracy to be merely enlightened, prudent, respectful of itself and of the law, well intentioned; it must be an absolutely independent magistracy if it is to be impartial. There are only two cases in which a magistracy is independent: if it has a sacred character in a very religious country, and if it is strong enough through its wealth to have neither hopes nor fears of anybody. In each case, its independence derives from the fact that it is a caste or class—that is to say, a power in the precise sense of the word, an autonomous force.

A democracy more thoughtful for its interests than for its passions could perhaps create within itself a sort of artificial class from the magistracy. It would be enough for the magistracy to be appointed neither by the Government nor by the

electors, but by itself; if, for example, all the magistrates appointed the High Court of Appeal and the High Court appointed the magistrates, and things went on thus indefinitely. Here is a class constituted. It asks nothing of either the central authority or of universal suffrage; it lives of itself and is sufficiently numerous not to become a set; it has its traditions and its perpetuity; it has to be independent, impartial and firm. I do not need to say that this organization has no chance of being tried by a people which finds the Institute and Order of Barristers a too aristocratic body and one incompatible with the harmony of democratic institutions. The best that can be hoped is that the magistracy continues to be appointed by the central authority. The central authority is a party, but a party a little less animated than any other; this ensures that the magistracy will be a little less dependent when appointed by the Government than by the electors. In truth, the only remedies for the dangers of Democracy are that Democracy should moderate itself of its own accord, should put the brakes on itself, so to speak; and such brakes can only be bodies having more or less an aristocratic character; but Democracy will never permit such bodies within itself; so, as Montaigne said, here we are arguing round in a circle.

However, is it not possible that out of the democratic State itself there will emerge aristocratic organisms which will be the classes and castes of the future? Assuredly, and it cannot even be otherwise. The old classes, the old aristocratic bodies, did not proceed from God's hands and did not figure in the creation. They made themselves, they freed themselves from the mass and gradually organized and constituted themselves. An aristocratic body in a nation is anything which, from being a diffused force, has become a concentrated, unified and articulate force; in a word, anything which incorporates itself. Are there such aggregations in course of formation? Are there bodies, aristocratic or potentially so, in course of organization in the heart of a democratic State? Tocqueville saw two such, and hinted at them. It is regrettable that he scarcely did more than mention them and that he did not pursue the study of these points further. It would have been the most interesting part of his work.

The first of these new aristocracies is, as everybody has thought, plutocracy. The only way by which men can gain distinction one from the other in modern societies is by wealth. Already, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Voltaire had said that there was so much difference between the man who could live on his revenue and he who could not that they seemed not to be of the same nature. The hatred, either secret or open, of Democracy for all those who possess, is another form of the struggle of the proletariat against the aristocracy, and probably it will be the most obstinate and the most violent.

However, it should be observed—and Tocqueville did so, although too summarily—that plutocracy has only a few superficial characteristics of aristocracy, and almost only its appearance. Plutocracy has too few hereditary rights, for wealth does not increase, nor can it even be kept, except by work, and anything—military bravery, traditional customs, magisterial dignity and austerity—is more easily inherited than the capacity for continuous work. Consequently fortunes are made and unmade with the utmost facility from one generation to another.

Plutocracy has not either a big hold on the people, because it is not, or is only slightly, territorial. The big present-day fortunes are, above all, in personal property; hence they are personal, assuring to their possessors certain enjoyments and a certain independence, but no power. The rich man is not noble. He has servants, dependents, spongers; but no vassals, and not even clients. He does not possess the poor man by having him under him, on his land, generation after generation. The rich man has to the poor only the relation of buyer to seller, employer to employee, and such relations are intermittent, changeable and rapid. Modern societies have not suppressed aristocracy, which nothing can suppress; they have *mobilized* it and thus very nearly dismantled it.

Finally, the moneyed aristocracy has no reason to be united, to organize itself and thus become a proper class. It has neither sentiments nor aims in common, and hardly the same manners. The rich man—sometimes with day-old riches, sometimes with hereditary; sometimes well educated, sometimes less well so; sometimes landowner, sometimes business man—resembles other

rich men only in that he takes the same seats at the theatre, and is of the same class only on the railway. This does not constitute a class, and is not even the preparation for one. Wealth is not a class, it is only a social category. Herein it is democratic itself, for it is individual and individualist. There are rich people as there were nobles; but there were nobles and a nobility; there are rich people but there is not a . . . The word is missing. Nothing proves better that rich men do not form a collective whole.

Perhaps it is just this which will save them. Wealth is of all the aristocracies the most open, the most variable and the least united. For these reasons, although it is not much liked, it is the least heavy; the masses hope to attain to its state and observe it appearing in their midst; they distinguish with difficulty its limits, which do not really exist, and would not know very exactly where to strike if they wanted to destroy it. In any case—whether it survives or perishes—it will never have the true characteristics, nor the power nor the consistency nor the ordinary effects, good or bad, of a true aristocracy.

There is another sort of aristocracy which is forming, growing, increasing daily in numbers and power, of which one does not often think and at whose existence Tocqueville hinted: it is bureaucracy. Says Tocqueville: "In France the administration forms in the State and, in a way, apart from the sovereign, a particular body which has its special habits, its own rules, agents who belong only to it, so that after a certain time it can present the phenomenon of a body that continues to walk after the head has been severed from it." Nothing is more true, nor has bigger consequences. The civil service in France, and in most of the European countries, is actually an almost autonomous body, and one which will be rendered more and more autonomous by democratic customs. It is not elected, it recruits itself; it is even somewhat hereditary, in the sense that it is always drawn from the same social class, the middle class; it has traditions, habits, special customs, *esprit de corps*, a certain general spirit which is unchanging; it has fairly strong professional qualities, much esteem for itself, its appearance and its dignity; it holds the secret of the management of affairs and

cannot be dispensed with; it has considerable analogies with the old magistracy. It increases incessantly in numbers and importance, because, in centralized societies, everything tends to become governmental, and anything which becomes governmental comes within the province of the civil service. It is the modern aristocracy. In truth its autonomy is in no way constitutional and legal. It is only a collection of agents in the hands of the central authority. But Democracy, by strengthening the central authority and making it more variable, merely strengthens the civil service, which it does not appoint. Democracy does not want a king—that is to say, a permanent chief for its officials; on the other hand, through the medium of its Parliament, it appoints ministers who merely leave their impression on things, since they have time to take the administration in hand but not to influence it, to make it operate or to modify it. It follows, therefore, that the administration alone is stable, traditional, really constituted, independent and strong. Democracy, without wanting, simply by the functioning of its mechanism, creates thus an aristocracy and retains it.

Like all aristocracies, bureaucracy is conservative, and maintains the existing order of things in spite of political changes. As Tocqueville very well said: "It makes revolutions at the same time easier to make and less destructive." In France, for example, it is fairly easy to seize the central power, but as it is more difficult to create from top to bottom a new civil service, the old is more or less retained, and it is observed that, in seizing the central power, scarcely anything has been gained. This illustrates exactly the character and rôle of an aristocracy as an intermediate power, and at bottom a real power, which allows the general to be changed without disturbing the framework of the army and, consequently, without causing any disunion in the army. This aristocracy will surely be maintained for a very long time and, like parliaments formerly, will be strong under weak governments, reserved and timid under accidentally strong governments, always preponderant in a nation, until the day when Democracy will feel that an aristocracy—that is to say, an independent power—has arisen, and will demand that Government officials be elected. Whether this time will

be soon or far-distant, in the meantime the only aristocracies which are to be seen forming and existing are wealth and bureaucracy, the one rather feeble in action and the other with a fairly powerful influence and hold. They will follow the evolution of all aristocracies, and no will know how long they will last and, even less, what social state will succeed them when they disappear.

VII

Such are the ideas which Tocqueville bestowed upon the public with great clearness, in good and charming style, with perfect intellectual honesty, and with occasional tediousness and some digressions. He was a good observer ; above all, he was a very penetrating and very deft *analyst*. Although he is a good logician, he does not argue from the dialectical point of view, nor is he fond of using the instrument of logic. To him an institution is a living being, whose mind and disposition he discerns by observations of its intrigues and its proceedings ; so to speak, its aspect. He is right ; for institutions are only men who have disposed themselves in a certain state, united by certain sentiments which were common to the great majority of them. By very energetic application, Tocqueville became fairly familiar with those collective beings which are called nations, and fairly skilled at discerning the chief sentiments which move them. He had more than anybody else an intuition of the modern world, of what it was and what it was going to become, and he is one of those men whose prophecies have been the least belied by subsequent facts. His was a very fine intellect, not very vast, but very alive, which travelled far along the path which it had once for all chosen, and was especially as much as possible sheltered from the danger of being obscured or diverted by the passions. He gave some excellent lessons on the progress of Democracy in modern times and some good advice on the precautions to be taken in the course of this great change. He is a professor of politics, very exact, very enlightening, very well informed and very sharp.

PROUDHON

PROUDHON

I

He was a man poor in health, frail and thin, if not puny, in his youth, "a little, lean, fair man," as he described himself; later he grew a little fat and heavy, unhealthily so, wan, his fine hair scarce and colourless, with a high meditative brow, and admirably clear eyes. His gait was hesitating and rather slow, his manners embarrassed and timid. He was more like a peasant than a workman, although the son of an artisan, and, above all, a recluse and a dreamer. "Well?" I once asked somebody who had been interviewing him. "Well, he looks like an angler!" I do not know for whom were penned these lines of Victor Hugo:

> "Quand vous vous assemblez, bruyante multitude,
> Pour aller le traquer jusqu'en sa solitude . . ."

you find:

> "Que cet homme pensif, mystérieux et doux."

Very probably for Lamennais, but they apply just as well, and even better, to Proudhon. He was a man of inward life and silence. The idea of going about in the world exasperated him. "All company wearies me. . . . I like my fellows, and yet they tire and annoy me. . . . Some men need the continual excitement of a big town, of the world, of the salons; of such were certainly Voltaire" (this is a mistake) "and Beaumarchais. Others must seek meditation in solitude, as did Rousseau and Saint-Pierre to develop their powers. I hate Parisian civilization. I can rest and recover the use of my mind and my faculties only beside the Doubs. Life is too much for me in this country of masters, servants, robbers and prostitutes. . . ."

He had very early in life a deep sentiment for nature, a very characteristic sign, which does not necessarily denote a man of imagination but reveals one who will never be a psychologist, an observer, nor a politician, a leader, a party-chief, and who will very probably be a dreamer, addicted to long meditation

and, if he has a logical mind, to systems. He likes to recall his childhood, which was partly that of a small worker and partly that of a small peasant: "I have seen my mother doing all this. She kneaded, did the washing, ironed, cooked, milked the cow, went into the fields to gather grass for it, did knitting for five people, mended the clothes. . . . Since then, I have had to become civilized. But—dare I admit it?—the small amount of civilization I have acquired disgusts me. I hate houses of more than one storey. . . . What pleasure it used to be to tumble about in the long grass, which I would have liked to eat like my cows, to run with bare feet on the smooth paths beside the hedges, and, putting on again the green Turkey slippers, to sink into the deep, fresh earth! . . . The peasant does not glance at Nature with the artist's eye; he loves her for her full breasts, for the life with which she abounds; he overwhelms her with caresses, like the lover in the Hymn of Hymns: *Veni et inebriamur uberibus.*"

He always remembers this rapture with regret. His life was lived at least as simply, as naturally, as closely as possible to this rustic ideal. He was a family man, husband of a poor wife, adoring his daughters, living in seclusion and confinement, imbued with a profound domestic sentiment and with absolute morality, and—to describe him exactly in a word I hardly ever use—virtuous.

He is rather proud of his virtue, having no tact, or perhaps rather no elegance; but he boasts in a simple way and with an expression of naïve astonishment which amuses but ought to bring tears to the eyes: "Have I not been from birth out of favour with Nature and Humanity? And yet my father was an honest man, my mother a worthy woman, my forefathers honest peasant-folk; as for myself, I have never deceived a child, wronged a young girl, lacked respect for an old man, nor slandered an adversary. I have worked well and sacrificed myself; I have worked as hard as I could, and my only reward is to be described sadly as 'a good fellow at heart but a dangerous and overbearing fool, a gaol-bird.'" Is this not touching? And does not this surprise at the fact that society does not care a straw for probity, loyalty and moral austerity, and that virtue

is not an element in success, betray a soul steeped in a charming ingenuousness?

Such was he, kind and obliging too, although distrustful. He wasted his worker's time, his only wealth, so precious to him, in sending information, references and explanations to almost anybody who asked him for them. With him this habit was a sort of eccentricity. He liked to be a director of conscience, a quite common tendency among virtuous men who are conscious of their virtue. His correspondence is full of "letters of guidance." Such a one as that to M. Penet (31st December 1863) is admirable and would do honour to a religious preacher. It is well known that the amiable jesters of this time, knowing of his harmless mania, invented a Madeleine seeking to be saved, and wrote him a "woman's letter" full of anguish, of a longing to be reformed and of confidence. They did a good thing; for Proudhon's reply is one of the most beautiful and lofty pages of all moral literature. He loved goodness, and practised it with all his heart, in spite of outbursts of his pride, which was greater than he thought; of his rage, which was not moderate; of his ill-feelings, which were extremely tenacious, and of his instinct for teasing, which, as he realized himself, was rather strong. He was the most disinterested person in the world, to such an extent that the idea of "literary propriety" horrified him, and he, an author, had in this respect an aversion which would seem perhaps more natural in a publisher. He is a curious example of those men, fairly numerous, who are virtuous without being wise. It is unfortunate that virtue does not always lead to wisdom; but this is only too true. Wisdom is composed of virtue and a sense of reality. Thus Marcus Aurelius is one to whom the word wise is applied. Proudhon had almost entirely one of these two parts and was almost entirely lacking in the other. But it is something to be half a wise man, especially when of the two necessary parts one has that which is the most noble and the most worthy of respect.

II

The education of his mind, although made absolutely at random, does not seem to me to have been comprehensive. He taught himself quite alone, but he found out fairly quickly where his mind liked to browse. He read very few of the ancient classics, chiefly Homer, Virgil and Tacitus; the Bible a great deal and, it is evident, several times; a few of the seventeenth-century authors, which he always liked, and then Voltaire and Rousseau. As regards literary studies, these seem to be about all. But philosophers and economists attracted and held his attention from an early age. Hegel, Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, Engels, Adam Smith, Say and Malthus are constantly in his hands, especially these last, and always in his memory. All his life he was a student of philosophy and political economy. It must be noticed that he had little interest in history, properly speaking, and really he has poor knowledge of it. In his book on *Justice in the Revolution and the Church* there is a sort of "Essay on Customs," which is very odd, and in which imagination plays a larger part than knowledge. Although he is all the time trying to found a philosophy of history, Proudhon, it seems, does not like to review historical facts. Possibly—and I am half certain that this is so—he finds that history, as it has always been told, hides from him facts—that is to say, economic facts, which are his only interest—and that it gives us the way in which peoples have been disturbed, have fought and perished, but not the way in which they have lived—that is, in which they have been politically organized, have worked, produced, exchanged, economized and suffered. And this alone, properly speaking, is important to him. Proudhon is like a sensitive doctor, a doctor by vocation. It is suffering humanity that he probes interestedly, and it is only therapeutics and pathology, if possible, that he wants to learn; and as there are two possible sorts of therapeutics, sociology and ethics, he was, and wanted only to be, a sociologist and a moralist.

When by chance he finds himself confronted by a pure artist this fact is clear. Either he ignores and condemns him or, drawing him to himself, he forces him, whether he likes it or not, to

be a moralist and sociologist, whatever he may really have been. We learn from Proudhon that Virgil wanted to burn the *Æneid*, because it was already, but not sufficiently, a book of social ethics which would have reformed the world and made Christianity useless. There are wanting two hundred more lines which Virgil intended to write, which the whole poem proclaims but which the author had not time to compose, and which would explain why he ordered the work to be destroyed. On the other hand, Delacroix is despicable because he paints indifferently ancient history, the history of the Middle Ages or modern history; and "after that what I do care if M. Delacroix has discovered another way of painting than M. Ingres?" Can one bear an artist who, while painting Boissy d'Anglas, "did not see that the Prairial insurrection was provoked by the Thermidorian reaction?" This means that Proudhon attaches importance only to facts, ideas and works which have, or might have, a sociological significance. Literature, fine arts and history, even as it has been made up to the present times, have not this significance or this import. History, in particular, has been eminently superficial and decorative. It has displayed the external drama of humanity, and has not shown us what the actors, back in their homes, do in the world. There is a disdainful and very happy expression of Stendhal's about the historians of the French Revolution whom he knew, which could be applied to all history: "They wrote the scenario of the French Revolution." Hence the deficiencies of Proudhon's education. He neglected ordinary history and literature because he despised them.

Although he had his reasons, he was wrong to do this, even from his particular point of view as a sociologist. Literature and history, even anecdotical, might perhaps have given him what he lacked most, a little of the feelings of delicacy. The brutal moralist in him might perhaps also have been refined, softened, which is less important but would still have been good. The hard logician in him might have been made supple, and Renan would not have been able to describe him so justly thus: "M. Proudhon, although open to any idea, thanks to the extreme flexibility of his mind, and able to understand in turn

the most varied aspects of things, does not seem to me to have conceived knowledge in a way sufficiently broad. . . . His knowledge is too exclusively abstract and logical. He is not yet sufficiently evolved from the scholasticism of the seminary; he reasons much; he does not seem to have sufficiently understood that, in the matter of the sciences of humanity, logical reasoning counts for nothing and that delicacy of mind is everything."

He was, however, very learned, and it must not be thought that, in his capacity of a determined logician, he despised facts. Nobody has gathered together so large a number, nor liked them as he did. But they were always purely economic facts, or facts having some connexion with economic science, and he considered them on account of this, and with this object. Thus it is that this man, passionately desirous for Man's happiness, but not very sociable, not very well known, not much of an observer, and, further, troubling little about writers and artists whose only thought was to depict Man, hardly put himself in the necessary condition to improve human nature, which is to know it. But do not let us insist on deficiencies, and after having indicated them, for the sake of definition, let us only ask of our man what he wanted to give us.

III

The first general impression which the reader gets of Proudhon's books is extremely confused. They seem an enormous collection of contradictions. They seem to have been conceived by a dreadful sceptic, who, by showing us in turns all the different aspects of every idea, wanted to leave us in uncertainty as to what we ought to believe true or probable or practical or impracticable. Such a positive, peremptory, even arrogant, mind produces the same effect as the superficial type of mind which glides quickly over ideas without ever wanting to grasp them. He, so decisive, is just as loose as an indecisive person would be. Ideas are to be seen dissolving, so to speak, in his hand and being reduced to something impalpable and powdery which vanishes. He is seen to give a substance in turn to the most contradictory theories and then to take it away from them. He

is a democrat, yet nobody says more ill of universal suffrage; his ideal is justice, yet he magnificently asserts, and almost extols, the right of force; he is an individualist with all his heart, yet Liberty in the form of competition seems to him a snare and a sort of continual assassination; he adores the French Revolution, yet detests and despises one after another the whole crowd of revolutionaries; he is a socialist, yet all the socialist systems are ruined by him with a power and perfection of clarity and logic from which nothing can be hoped. Apart from ethics, properly speaking, and also the limited ethics of private and domestic life, on all other questions he is like a subtle magician and a dexterous conjurer, showing them under the most varied aspects and transforming and deforming them at a touch. He is a Proteus who communicates his nature to everything he touches, and turns into Protei themselves all the objects upon which he casts his eye.

According to him this is a method, and nothing more. He has acquired Hegel's manner. He lays down thesis and antithesis and looks for the synthesis. He shows of every human institution that it is true, that it is false, and that it becomes true again when taken in a new way and cleansed of what made it false; and that it is just, that it is unjust, and that it will be justified afresh by being exercised in a new way.

There is some truth in this explanation which he often gave of himself; but, after much study of him, one is bound to feel convinced that this method was, especially with him, an instinct raised to the dignity of a method and a pretence disguised under the fine appearance of a system. First of all it was an instinct, an inborn turn of mind; he himself let fall a confession of this in a *post scriptum*, and it could be said that this *post scriptum* reveals the thought at the back of his mind: "You know that, by temperament, I rather make fun of everything, even of my beliefs, and that this constitutes the basis of my conscience." What a strange conscience! Such a statement might be passed over as a mere fancy were it not clearly evident, in considering him, that he had actually an essential quality of jeering ridicule which he applied very well even *to what he believed*. Proudhon's first action when confronted with an idea is to shrug his shoulders

and deny its existence, even when it is his own idea, although in this case less often, less quickly and less complacently. He is one of those people who like to deny. There are minds for which this first period of the examination of a thing is a moment or a time of sympathetic interest: "That is curious, interesting, probably just. Can it be the truth?" And they hope that it is the truth. Later come doubts. There are other minds for which this same period is always one of defiance and of ill-humour: "What is this, then? Another human folly, a declamation, a sophism, an empty commonplace!" And they hope that it is not something else. Later a little indulgence sometimes creeps into their views. At bottom, Proudhon certainly belonged to this second group of minds.

Above all, without exactly being fond of paradox, for he was not a charlatan, he had an instinctive dread of any sort of general belief. Many men, even men of conspicuous mental greatness, are persuaded that the mass cannot be absolutely mistaken, and the *consensus generis humani* leads them always. They consider that there is an inward truth, surrounded, perhaps, by many shadows, but all the same a kind of central truth, in what the majority of men believes to be true, and that in what the majority accepts there is a relative truth, a momentary and circumstantial truth, something which for the time being must do duty for the truth. Proudhon was not at all this type of man, and I believe that, without studying an idea, without even thinking, perhaps, instinctively, it was enough that it was widely accepted by the mass, or even by a considerable group of his contemporaries, for him to be led to the conclusion that for that reason it was a stupidity. This democrat had an extremely aristocratic mind.

I said further of this famous system that it was often a pretence and an evasion for him. I strongly believe this, though I will add what I believe to be true, that it was undoubtedly an unconscious means of pretence and subterfuge, by which he was the first to be deceived. Writing much, discussing and arguing all day and every day, he necessarily came across evident contradictions. His method, or the invocation of his method, provided him with a wonderful means of concealing them. He said: "When I made that assertion I was in the thesis; now I am

in the antithesis, and the synthesis will come later. I cannot say everything at once." This is the method of procedure of all those who could be accused of contradicting themselves. At the same period his friend, Emile de Girardin, was using the same method, only he had a much easier and prouder style, which is decidedly suspicious in his case. With controversialists the Hegelian method is an admirable and rather easy form of strategy.

As a matter of fact, with Proudhon, although it was a habit of his intellectual temperament and an expedient of polemics, it was, at the same time, a rational practice which came easily to him. The incredible suppleness of his dialectician's mind adapted itself quite naturally to this method, as also did his great taste for masses of facts: because, in this procedure, he was able to dispose his facts in two lines of battle, or from the same facts to draw and establish in two long lines two series of contradictory consequences, and dispositions of this sort—I had almost said representations—gave him, as a very clever stage manager, infinite intellectual delight. The Hegelian method consists, especially with controversialists, in having on a given question an original idea, then a second, which is contradictory to the first, and then a third, which need not be in agreement with either of the other two; and minds which have many ideas are naturally enchanted with such a method. Now Proudhon abounds in ideas, and loves them all, when they are his own. His is one of the most fertile *intellectual imaginations* there has ever been; he is an artist in ideas and reasonings.

In things of this type his production, although rather incoherent, badly ordered and badly arranged, is unlimited. He thinks he will write a tract on a question and he writes a volume. Each time he takes pen in hand this chance befalls him. In one case, instead of the projected tract, he wrote three volumes, consisting of fifteen hundred pages (*Justice in the Revolution and the Church*). To minds of this sort the method of contradictions is an almost inevitable temptation, like the dialogue form, which is not very different. It permits them to open out all their ideas, all the pros and cons, all the intermediate and accessory arguments; and it gives rise less than the dialogue

form to the idea of a possible scepticism on the author's part, and has a more philosophic character than it; and to what would seem incoherent under the dialogue form it gives, on the contrary, the character and the appearance and affectation of fine dogmatism. Now Proudhon was precisely one of those men who are not sceptical, but who have in them the makings of a sceptic, and who believe themselves to be dogmatic, men who see immediately the pros and cons of a question and think they see the solution to it. He unconsciously made straight for the method of exposition, which was the very image, and a sort of mould, of his mind.

IV

A mind of this sort, thus equipped, must be that of a critic; and, actually, it is thus that he is commonly pictured and defined; it is in this capacity that he remains clearest in the memory of men. "Proudhon? Ah, yes, a writer who took to pieces every political system of his time and left the parts lying about on the ground. Not one resisted him." He was something else besides, but primarily he was a critic.

He was wonderfully clever at starting from an axiom, as he often said, and progressing by stages of deduction up to the final argument; but inversely he was an expert at tracing any doctrine back to its first principle, which was certainly its true source, though sometimes concealed, thus grasping the doctrine in its entirety and holding it at his mercy. Political and moral doctrines are the kind of axioms which are most capable of being discussed and which yield best to the assaults of logic.

And his art consisted precisely in making political and social doctrines into logical systems, in transforming his contemporaries' ideas, whatever they might be, into series of deductions so as thus to have them at his command and break them up logically, a thing he often did in masterly fashion.

The beliefs and theories upon which his incisive critical faculty was chiefly practised are: the sovereignty of the people —the principle of nationalities—religious instinct.

The sovereignty of the people is a pure "sophism" and a veritable "utopia": "Those who have brought us to the

condition in which we find ourselves (in 1853) are these so-called logicians, who, by exaggerating the electoral scheme of M. Duvergier of Haurenne, have given to us at one blow ten million electors whose ideas for the most part were about on a level with those of the ancient Roman common people. In two words, we are victims of *a utopia*. Instead of making progress we have achieved the absolute; we have taken literally and as being of immediate truth, *a priori*, and unconditionally, the dogma of the people's sovereignty, and we have achieved, with this sovereignty, exactly the same result as was formerly attained by the Greek and Roman cities—that is, tyranny. . . . The dogma of the people's sovereignty is perfect nonsense."

For Proudhon, who in certain respects is a wild idealist, in the sense that he believes only in his own pure ideas and his own particular logic, numbers are nothing, and the tendencies and the aspirations of the greatest number, which are confused ideas and vague sentiments, should count as nothing. It is *reason*, the rational law, which is the sovereign. "There is no other sovereignty but that of reason and the law," and "the discovery of the law is, in politics as in physics, the reward of observation and obstinate study, and neither the people's will nor that of anyone in particular has anything to do with it." In other words, politics is a science. It is carried out, like all sciences, by observations and arguments—observations which bear upon the nature and proceedings of humanity as a whole since its existence, and arguments which co-ordinate all these observations and infer from them a general law. And who makes these observations? Who infers this law? It is the scholar, and there are no other sovereigns in society but law (in the scientific sense) and the scholar who interprets it. To oppose these two, to substitute for them the confused and contradictory intuitions of a multitude which knows neither history nor the art of reasoning, is a monstrous absurdity. An intelligent, informed and scientific despotism is the natural and necessary conclusion to this consideration.

It must be observed that in the absolute he is perfectly right. Only, for a very long time it has been clear that nobody has this complete information on the nature of humanity, that nobody

grasps this " law " which should be inferred from this complete information, and that every other man believes he is, and nobody really is, this scholar who possesses the secret of the law. Hence we grope in the dark, because humanity has never done, and cannot do, otherwise, and all the " sovereignties "—including that of the people—tried one after another at different times, are nothing but expedients ; but until the coming of the supreme scholar, the infallible scholar, the god of sociology, we can but have recourse to expedients. Monarchic sovereignty is an expedient, just as is aristocratic sovereignty or parliamentary sovereignty, which is a more or less well-adjusted mixture of the aristocratic and the popular ; just as is the people's sovereignty finally. Each of these has its merits, and the combination of these various expedients is another expedient, which also is not without merit.

And which one of these various expedients shall be chosen? It would be wrong to suppose that there is a choice. It is circumstance which imposes one or the other, or the combination of one with others, upon us. " Fatality feeds on us," and we cannot be food for anything else. The art of the politician is simply to understand the successive forms which this fatality takes and to adapt to them the detailed measures, which are the only ones of which he is, up to a certain point, master. This gives him still a very vast field and a sphere big enough—and even too big—for his ability and his intelligence.

On this point it can be observed, in order to tease Proudhon and to please the partisans of universal suffrage, and above all because it is true, that the people's sovereignty, however irrational it may be considered, is *in fact* first of all one of these necessary expedients we have just mentioned, and then has always existed at bottom, and has always made itself felt, whatever was the apparent form and external appearance of the government. A government has two sorts of power, one positive and active, the other negative. It acts and prevents action. It possesses the *jubeo* and the *veto*. Of these two powers the greater and stronger is the second. He who has the *veto* has sovereignty. The people's tribunes, in spite of the incompleteness of their *veto*, knew this well. Now, the mass has always had the *veto*.

Even the most aristocratic governments have never done all that they wanted. They did what they wanted only when the mass, in a general way, approved; as nearly as possible they did what the mass wanted, since they never did what it absolutely did not want. The national will, at least in the form of national acquiescence, is then precisely this "law" which Proudhon says is inferred by the scholar from observation of humanity as a whole, and which he expects us to obey. Only, this popular will was exercised formerly in a very general, very slow, very distant and very indirect way; as a matter of fact, so generally, slowly, distantly and indirectly that it was fairly easy to evade it, not completely, not for all time, for it ended always by having its own way, expressed though in a vast number of legislative measures and particular decisions. It was informed too late, and manifested itself too slowly, to bring any immediate weight to bear on the daily resolutions of the central power; it arrived almost always after the event and was confronted by the accomplished fact. But, in relation to the increase in the ease and speed of acquiring information and making communication, it has come more rapidly into play, more continuously into action, and openly into contact with those invested with power. It is the rapidity in means of communication which has transformed the national will from a latent force into an ever-felt force, or from a force slow in action to one rapid and instantaneous in action. Hence, national will is a law derived from a universal and permanent fact which, already immense, does nothing and will do nothing from day to day but confirm itself and attract greater attention to itself. Therefore it must be accepted until a day comes when complete and absolute science shall rule. May such a time come! But everything leads to the belief that there will be long to wait.

The principle of nationality also found in Proudhon a very vigorous and very powerful critic. It was a fairly new idea to his time and very popular. It was extremely flattering in its simplicity to contemporary intelligences, which were entirely delighted with general ideas; and the fact that France had nothing to gain by the principle was only a further reason why this chivalrous people should become infatuated by it with a

sort of religious ardour. Proudhon was guided in this case less by his patriotism, which seems to me never to have been very accentuated, less even by his good sense, than by his contradictory disposition and his dread of the ideas, even when they were just, which he saw adopted on the spur of the moment by a great number of imbeciles; and he challenged such ideas with extraordinary warmth and animation. I cannot bring myself to make use of the term "pure humbug," which he uses unblushingly, but I will say that this principle seems to his eyes to belong rather to the order of oratory than of science. He does not believe in this "collective being," of which so much has been said and which is called a nation. I know very well that he expresses his belief in it in a letter to Michelet, but elsewhere—and even if this seems a contradiction I will say that in the case of Proudhon no attention should be paid to such things—he jeers harshly at this "analogy so easy to make between the individual's life and the development of nations." That in the case of a people there is childhood, adolescence, maturity and decadence is a thing which he "formally denies in opposition to Montesquieu, Bossuet, etc." It is a puerile idea: "This word decadence," for example, "applied to a society in comparison with the phenomena of individual life, is more than wrong; it is false, it expresses an impossible and absurd thing."

This is as much as to say that a people does not exist—and if this is not my way of thinking it is, it seems to me, Proudhon's. A people is not an organism, nor even an organization; it is only an association for protection and defence, in the same way as there are commercial and industrial associations. Hence nationalities, whether in power, or quite free to exercise themselves fully, or suppressed by a conqueror, have nothing which makes them respectable and on which their authority depends. On the contrary even, since an ordinary association for protection and defence is safer the more it expands, so a small nationality should aspire to, and tend with all its strength—or rather, for this would be the case, with all its voluntary weakening—towards its inclusion in a more extensive and more formidable association.

Without going as far as this, Proudhon is content to say, what

is very true after so many upheavals, mutual invasions and fusions, more or less voluntary or approved, which make the " race questions " inextricable, that nationality is " indefinable " and that it is the principle of constitutional Liberty which should be substituted everywhere for the principle of nationality. A people is free and has nothing further to demand or desire when it is an association freely discussing the means of its existence, defence and improvement, or even when it is included as part of a more extensive association in which it can discuss freely these same means.

It is this conception of things which must have led Proudhon to recognize the authority of force. As we shall see later on, it was by another way that he arrived at this conclusion, but he might equally have come to it this way. As a matter of fact, it is on the subject of nationalities that he says that the principle which declares them inviolable " might have stopped the march of civilization." That is to say that, as civilization once in ancient times tended towards the constitution of vast social agglomerations and sacrificed particular nationalities to that end; and as a second time since the Middle Ages its tendency has seemed constantly towards the same object; and as this tendency had produced results only through violence; so violence is justified by its results and must be considered lawful. We will find this theory later in another place. For the moment, we would draw attention to the way in which Proudhon dissolves, in some way, the theory of nationalities in the difficulties which its definition puts before him; and because he cannot or will not see in what a nation consists, does not perceive the rights of nations, the law of nations, and even goes so far as to deny its existence, he is naturally led to recognize force as the only international principle, and to bow down before it.

A third object of Proudhon's crushing analysis is the religious instinct. It is rather surprising that Proudhon was anti-religious, seeing that the anti-religious passion was so common to his time. In general, he did not like to think himself the things that were being thought by his fellow-men. Contemporary " Liberalism " and " Democracy "—I mean the parties which called themselves Liberal and Democratic respectively—joined forces to attack the

religious instinct, and hence it is surprising that Proudhon did not defend it. There were, however, enough religious spirits in France to enable Proudhon, by his attacks on religions, to displease many people, and this must have satisfied him. Also there was the chance that, if he made his attacks very radical and violent, he could even displease the anti-religious people; and this is precisely what he did. The "Liberal" middle class and the "Democratic" working class of 1830 to 1850 were anti-clerical and confusedly anti-religious; but they were deists, very complacently and even with some ardour, be it true or affected. By posing as the enemy not only of religions but of the idea of God, he displeased, first, the religious spirits, then, and perhaps even more, because it compromised them, the Liberal middle classes and "Jacobins" who remained deists; and these were the two groups to which Proudhon was particularly keen on being unpleasant. Decidedly, here again he was very faithful to the habits of his disposition.

But this is only a temperamental tendency. What idea did Proudhon make out of it? His most comprehensible idea on this question is the following. Man is made to think beyond and above reality. He is made to meditate the absolute. Only, in obeying this tendency of his nature, he goes astray. He takes the *ideal* for the *absolute*. They are very different, and even opposite, things. The absolute is rational; the ideal, or at least that to which Proudhon always gives this name, is sentimental. The ideal is a dream of perfection, of goodness, of beauty, which does not respond to anything in nature and which only responds to certain imaginative and exalting faculties in man which he has come to suspect, since in practical life they always bring him distress. It is a poet's dream, if you like, an artist's, if that pleases you, a visionary's in his opinion. It arises from an imperfection and deficiency in our mind which, seeking and feeling the need for the absolute, has not enough strength to discover it, and so replaces it by a vague idealism; imagination has taken the place of, and done duty for, reason, which is still too weak and for the time being powerless. There is no cause to blame the men of former times for this error, this substitution. They wanted to escape from reality, and they did so as best

they could. They were right to seek beyond reality, but wrong —although it was not their fault—to take a poetical chimera for a rational concept. There is a true and a false metaphysic. The true is made from concepts of reason, the false from triflings of the imagination. The true has the absolute as its object, and achieves that object; the false aims at the ideal and fails. Now the highest limit of imaginative metaphysic is the idea of God, and there is evidence that there is no God, and that thoughtful and sincere deists recognize that the existence of God is not proved.

God does not exist; not only does he not exist, but he is fatal to humanity which believes in him. "The ideal is the source of all sin," it is "the origin of evil," it corrupts and perverts Man. Why? Because it makes him idolatrous. Idolatry consists in adoring as if it were a person or a being, whom we immediately and necessarily endow with tastes, passions, etc., similar to our own, an absolute, a principle which ought only to be a pure axiom, a pure cold law. By embodying an absolute in a person, by introducing a rational principle into the workshop of our imagination, we have disfigured and distorted the absolute and have nothing but an idol above us. Idolatry is "idealatry" and vice versa.

This is dangerous. As soon as humanity has this erroneous conception, since it is hybrid, not only does it not make progress but it recedes. With its own hands, humanity has placed an obstacle between itself and the realization of its work, between itself and its goal; until it discovers that it is to its own satisfaction to fashion a superior concept which must guide, enlighten and uphold it. Poetic idealism, and deism, which is the complete expression of it, is a long roundabout way on which humanity has gone astray in its search for the absolute, before it has worked out the real object of its inquiries and the real and only way of achieving that object. Let us, then, combat what is left of idealism in Man as a subtle poison of his intellect, an intoxication of his mind and a trap for his reason.

If I have understood rightly—and I cannot vouch for that—these are the reasons which Proudhon gives for his dread of deism; they are to be found scattered through his works, but

chiefly in the *ninth study* of *Justice in the Revolution and the Church.*

On the one hand, this distinction between the absolute and the ideal is rather shrewd, and on the other, this perversion of Man by idealism is not much proved. What men have put into the idea of God is just as much the absolute as the ideal, using this last word in the sense which Proudhon gives to it. They have considered God as sovereign justice, sovereign intelligence, and sovereign reason just as much as supreme beauty, supreme power, supreme majesty. They have even a much clearer conception of God as absolute than as ideal. For the good ordinary deist, who is neither brilliant nor a theologian, whatever be his religion, God is a very intelligent being, who knows all, who orders well-being, who directs order and maintains and repairs it and punishes those who disturb it; and the realization of order in humanity is precisely the object of Proudhon's investigations, which, when realized, he calls the absolute.

But, generally speaking, men have incorporated in the idea of God all things that are superior in them, beauties of the imagination just as much as of the reason. That is true. Is it a reason for believing that these beauties of the imagination which they have embodied in the idea of God can pervert them? There is cause to doubt it. Certainly men have not been able to prevent themselves from making of God a man, a superman, by giving him, carried to the infinite, all the beauty they find in themselves as well as all the good. They have wanted to adore him not only with their rational faculties but with their imagination. It is this last point which, according to Proudhon, is bad. But it must be proved that the contemplation of the beautiful is perverting, and this is neither easy to prove nor to admit. Without believing that the beautiful has necessarily a moralizing virtue, it is very difficult to conceive that in itself it is corrupting. Proudhon always inclined to believe this and tried several times to prove it. It is vaguely the basis of his thought, which is extremely controvertible. To speak as kindly as possible, the beautiful at the very least brings to the soul a certain calmness, which is not a bad state, and is more favourable than unfavourable to the birth of the idea of good. I quite agree that between

the beautiful and the good there is not the necessary harmony, concord, co-operation and, above all, mutual production; but I fail to see that there is antagonism. Proudhon believes he sees this antagonism, and this is why the beautiful, moving and lovable God is hateful to him and seems corrupting.

It is unnecessary to add that what he thus pursues with his hatred—or, if you like, with his defiance—is, on a final analysis, the personal God. If men embodied in their idea of God all that made them proud of their soul, it was in order to make Him as personal as possible. If they were not satisfied with the God of all reason, if they wanted the God of all beauty, all charm and all love, it was so as to enrich, perfect and confirm in their eyes his personality—it was, if we may be permitted a sacred word so characteristic, so as to have a living God. God is never living enough for him who delights in belief; and if men have conceived a God so personal, it is so as to be able to love him the more, to enable them to love him. One does not love a law, one recognizes it and submits to it; one does not love reason, one admires it; one would not love a being endowed only with sovereign reason, one would admire him coldly. It is to enable them to love God that men have imagined him so exactly personal, at the risk, I agree, of making him too much like themselves. The question, which a moment ago was whether contemplation of the beautiful was corrupting, becomes, therefore, now, whether love of God is corrupting.

That can be upheld, and Proudhon's long considerations of the misdeeds of mysticism prove that it can be upheld with talent. But to take things in this way makes victory too easy. Love of God is a sentiment; it is the transformation of a belief into a sentiment, of an idea into an emotion. As soon as there is sentiment in any direction there is always the risk of being led to all sorts of fine efforts, all sorts of sublime acts, all sorts of heroism on the impulse of passion; and there is the danger of falling into all the excesses which passion induces. That proves quite simply that passion is the only force. The idea of law, the idea of order, pure and simple, impersonal, will certainly never induce any excess; neither will it impel to any heroism, nor even give a desire to accomplish any act; it will inspire nothing at

all but resignation and tranquillity. Men are moved only by the passions. Therefore, if you want a principle of action among men, you must consent to their being guided to a sentiment. Among sentiments, are not those of most value which derive from ideas instead of being simple suggestions of the instinct? Are not those of most value which are ideas transformed into sentiments? And among these ideas transformed into sentiments, these sentiments sprung from ideas, is not the purest, or the least impure, the healthiest, or the least unhealthy, that one which was born of the idea which man has formed by gathering and putting together all the best that he found in himself? This is the idea of God; this sentiment is love of God. There are at least chances that this sentiment inspires generally fairly moral acts, and, although I will admit that it is not impossible that it may have its dangers, I cannot at all understand that anyone should consider it as the essentially corrupting element of the human heart.

In respect to any sort of sentiment Proudhon has an unconquerable mistrust. He was so fond of laws and axioms that he believed that Man can be moved and enraptured, for the greatest good of humanity, by contemplation of a formula. It is not very likely.

Just one final reflection on Proudhon considered as a critic. At the bottom of his ideas on nationalities, on what constitutes a people, on national sovereignty, on the religious instinct, we seem to be able to grasp a common feature, an aversion to everything which unites men and binds them to each other. A people considered as a collective being is the idea of a mutual, limited dependence between the different parts of this people; and Proudhon does not like such an idea. A "nationality" is the idea of a race considered as a person living for an indefinite time and having on this account rights to be respected, and therefore it is the idea of a limited dependence between ancestors and dependents; and Proudhon does not like such an idea. The sovereignty of the people is the idea that one person's will cannot be independent of his fellow-citizens' will, that it must give way under the pressure of theirs, and that his tastes, inclinations, conceptions, thought, soul, person, must conform to

the general tendencies, to the general soul, if I may be permitted the expression, of his fellow-citizens; and here, again, is an idea that Proudhon did not like at all. Finally, the religious instinct can be personal; but it has always given rise to religions, and these are the strongest bonds which men have ever found to unite themselves with each other; religions are, or they want to be, so intimate a communion that each person lives solely on the sentiment common to all, that anything that is not this sentiment is despised as being worthless, and that, in consequence, each personality is as far as possible abolished—and of all conceptions this is the one which is most foreign and most repugnant to Proudhon.

Proudhon, then, likes least the things which unite us and make us fit in with our fellows, however that may be. He is strongly, passionately individualist. He wanted man to be at liberty; he wanted contracts between men to be always free, always revocable, very short, at any rate, and not binding. "It is frantic individualism," as Mr Hyndman said of conceptions similar to his. It is also an unreasonable and intractable liberalism. The word *anarchy*, which he let fall and then withdrew, or confirmed by explaining it in a way which was tantamount to a withdrawal amidst his own congratulations—all his sensational words suffered this treatment—expresses well the final tendency of his mind. He did not want government, by which it must be understood, giving this word its full meaning, that what he did not want was not merely all those things which bind Man and make him obey, but also all those which mark out his way and direct him towards a goal which he has not himself chosen. We will not examine further what Proudhon attacked and wanted to destroy, but when we have tried to reconstruct into a system what he wanted to persuade and recommend and establish, we shall see that this unyielding individualism is actually the aspiration and inspiration of his whole mind.

V

In truth, considering Proudhon no longer as a critic, but as a dogmatist, we find as the basis and centre of his thinking one

very precise and permanent idea, his leading idea, which is that of justice. Justice must be realized on earth in an absolute fashion: "The true constitution of society has as foundation justice, considered at the same time as a power of the soul and as the idea of judgment; this principle, based on spiritual and intelligible conception, is inherent in human nature. . . ." For "Humanity," as Rousseau said, "is by nature virtuous; its being free is sufficient for it to bring forth acts from its virtue." Of its own accord, "spontaneously," its virtue goes to the "creation of order"—that is to say, the realization of justice. It must not be said that many men, the majority of men, in most of their doings are unacquainted with the spirit of justice and seem to have no notion of it. Although it is true as a fact, it is no good as an argument. In the same way not five persons in a thousand are healthy, yet that does not prevent health from being the natural state of Man. Thus argues the tenacious idealism or, if he prefers, the sense of the absolute in Proudhon.

The realization of justice is, then, the natural aim of Man, his moral law, just as his physical law is to be in good health. Justice is the health of the soul. The history of humanity is humanity's efforts to create order within its household, to draw justice from chaos. All the big historical upheavals are efforts to substitute justice for force by means of force; and since the means always momentarily get the better of the end, it is quite true that always one force is merely substituted for another. But it is always justice which has been the inspiring thought of the movement, and it is justice, to a certain extent, which has really profited by it; and all these small profits will go one day to make up an ultimate benefit, an almost complete realization, and then, finally, a complete realization, of justice on earth.

Do we not see that, though it makes mistakes, humanity, each time it makes a big movement, progresses towards justice even when it seems to be looking for something else? Christianity went astray in the conception and the creation of some sort of ideal. But across the fantastical *ideal*, the *absolute*—that is to say, the law of justice—made its course, and one day the ideal vanished, the mystic passion was calmed, and there remained

only the idea of a better and a bigger order, of a more rigorous justice to be maintained and upheld among men. The basis of the French Revolution—and for this reason, even if its heroes were small, its ideas were immense and immortal, a judgment which Renan also passed several times—was the idea of justice. At this period the idea which entered men's heads was that the resolution could be substituted for the command, that there could be a society in which the programme of things to be done during the year or during a period of ten years could issue, not from the head of one man, not from the head of several, but from the heads of all, regularly and periodically consulted. And this is perhaps politically an error, just as Christianity was morally ; but even so it is an effort, bigger and, above all, clearer, at the realization of justice, to do away with what is undoubtedly the biggest, the most painful and most unworthy difference established between men—that is, the scheme of things whereby on the one hand one or several men command, while on the other millions obey. The basis of the Revolution, at the risk of immense disappointments when it came to be given practical application, was simply an imperious need for, and a vast idea of, justice.

And if Proudhon is always contrasting the idea of justice in the Revolution with the idea of injustice in the Church, the reason, as can be seen by reading his works completely and closely, is that the Church had set the exact model of government and the Revolution, by its principle, destroyed the idea of government, while in practice it set up one which was formidable.

The Revolution tended towards *an-archy*. Essentially this was so. It said : there is no sovereignty, there is no command, but there are resolutions. In this it was *just*. Command, the right to command, is an injustice. Justice and command are contradictory terms. Absolute justice is *an-archy*. The tendency should be towards this practically—that is to say, progressively. The state of things to be achieved is that where nobody commands and all obey. The first step towards the realization of justice, its first constitution—imperfect, by the way, and clumsy—is all obeying all ; the last step and its ultimate constitution will be all

obeying the pure, cold, strict, precise, invariable law, expressive of eternal justice, defined in the finally discovered terms of absolute justice. And always the Revolution remains a step in this direction, and a progress, especially an intuition, a vision, a *prevision* and a sort of foretaste of justice.

This, it seems to me, is Proudhon's leading idea; all must tend towards absolute justice, must be led to its realization; nothing has any value except relatively to justice, and in so far as it is a means for its establishment or a path which leads to it.

But we must have a precise knowledge of what justice is, we must try not to be satisfied with vague words. With Proudhon, in spite of the sophistry of his discussion, one can always be certain of not remaining at an oratorical level and of going to the extreme and clearly defined limits of an idea. For Proudhon, as for all who have gone below surfaces, justice is nothing but equality among men. Justice and equity are synonymous and equity has no other meaning but equality. If justice is not a vain word, if the instinct for justice is not mistaken, if the passion for justice is the very conscience of humanity, men must be equal; or rather, the one is not the consequence of the other; they are the same thing. In a desire for justice men simply want equality; in trying to realize the latter their only thought is to gain and establish the former. They are either innocents or hypocrites, who, in order to delight in a nobler word or to disguise the raw hard word under the lofty one, say justice instead of equality. Equality is the exact name for justice. In order to achieve justice men must be equals. But they are not equals by their own nature or by Nature. They are equal neither in strength, nor intelligence, nor anything. And not only are they not equals, but it would be extraordinary and strangely abnormal if they were; for there is no equality in Nature. Nature is inequality, iniquity and injustice itself. She wants the strong to smother the weak, and, as if for that reason, she has made only strong and weak. She has given no equality to her creatures, as though to give herself the spectacle of this sport—the strong crushing the weak, the weak defending themselves, either by cunning or by flight—thus proving their inferiority and the inequality of which they are the victims—or by coalition, and thus, giving up their individual

autonomy, their personality, suppressing themselves as entities, confirming in a more striking fashion their inferiority and inequality; since, in truth, to continue whatever be their apparent life, they must kill themselves. Here is the lesson of Nature, and her order in every sense of the word; it is thus that she is regulated, that she commands the universe.

In compliance with the idealism of the particular nature to which I have drawn attention in Proudhon, he would reply that that makes no difference; that, while the majority of men is ill, health is all the same the natural state of Man; that, although all Nature may be injustice, justice is none the less her law. To such bold assertions there is nothing much to be said. But he goes farther; he affirms that equality exists even in Nature, and that Nature shows it to us even as our hearts make us love her and our minds conceive her. Do you not see the equality that reigns in the natural laws? "The days of the year are equal, the years equal, the moon's revolutions, variable to a certain extent, always come back to equality. The law of the planets is a law based on equality. Let us look at our own globe; is not the quantity of rain that falls each year in all countries sensibly the same? What is more variable than temperature? And yet, in winter, in summer, by day, by night, equality is still the law. Equality governs the ocean, whose ebb and flow happen, on an average, with the regularity of a clock."

To give as proof of equality among beings the regularity of the astronomical laws is not very convincing. Nature has uniformities. That is certain, but one of these uniformities is just the inequality between living people. She has laws. That is unquestionable, but one of these laws is precisely the law of the strongest. This is just what Proudhon does not admit. When it comes to men, they not only must be, but they are, equal. If that is not apparent, if they are not entirely equal, it is by accident: "Man is essentially equal to man, and if, on a test, there are some who are backward, it is because they have not wanted or been able to make the best of their means. . . . If some difference is manifest between them, it arises, not from the creative thought which has given men being and form, but from external circumstances under which individualities are

born and developed."[1] Thus equality is founded not only "on right, but on fact," not only on the absolute but on fine and good reality.

Nothing is more false. As a fact there is not a jot of equality nor even justice in Nature. Beings are what they are capable of being. Nature throws them into the thick of the fight and seems to wish them good luck as she releases them, without wanting to bother any more about them. She creates interminably for death—and not for death only, which we accept although it must seem strange to create so vainly and to blow soap-bubbles in this way—but she creates for struggle and slaughter; and not only for struggle and slaughter, but for endless massacre, striving to give weak species an enormous power of generation and of rapid multiplication, so that they shall not be obliterated by their weakness and that the massacre can last endlessly. There is nothing in the world more unequal, more *inequitable* and more unjust than the world.

And, as a right, what is this right to justice at bottom, this right to equality, if not a desire that one experiences for it? Where is the right of one man to be the equal of another? It is something that is in no way established. It is obvious that it is disagreeable for a man to feel above him a man who strongly resembles him and evidently belongs to the same species. But this is only a sentiment, praiseworthy perhaps, natural undoubtedly; but a pure sentiment. It is also evident, perhaps, that equality established between men would be something satisfying to look upon, it would not have troublesome dissonances, shocking disparities and confusing disproportions; but this is only an æsthetic conception, controvertible moreover, and no basis for a right. Proudhon's whole argument rests either on a fact which is false or on an axiom which is only an affirmation, and the affirmation of what? Of a weak man's desire that all men should be as weak as he. That constitutes an idle theory, which is not even a system.

It is just the frailty of his system, however brilliant he may have rendered it by its development and especially by digressions, which led him to transform it at one moment in a rather

[1] This mad idea had been, as is known, very seriously taught by Helvétius.

unexpected, and some have said scandalous, way. The theorist of justice became the theorist of the right of force. As often happens, the system, in its development, ended by being turned against its premises and refuting itself, at the same time asserting that it remained faithful to its principle and perhaps actually being so. In *War and Peace* Proudhon upheld that war was an essential factor in civilization, and force a justice, an element at least of justice and the most powerful and decisive means by which justice can be realized.

How? He had already indicated this in the same book in which he made the theory of Justice and Equality, in *Justice in the Revolution and the Church*. There already, to those who pointed out to him that equality did not exist in fact between men, that, for example, certain human races were manifestly inferior to others, he replied clearly that, if such was the case, the inferior races would be absorbed by the others and would end by being obliterated, and that in this way equality would quite well have the last word and be established. And he adds: "Justice or death! Such is the law of the Revolution!"

This was not just a fancy, and it should be observed that, on examination of his theory, Proudhon was forced to come to this conclusion. Here is the train of his ideas:

Inequality is monstrous and against all reason. Furthermore, I deny it as a fact; it does not exist; it is only an outward appearance. However, it does exist, and it must be understood that if it did not exist I would not be combating it; it exists and is more than an outward appearance; I do not fight against phantoms; it is more than outward show; it is *accident*. This accident must disappear. How? By the disappearance of the strong. It is they who constitute inequality and perpetuate it. . . . But also perhaps, and just as well, by the disappearance of the weak. If it is equality I am seeking, and purely equality, it can be constituted just as well by the disappearance of inferiors as by that of superiors; for it is superiority which constitutes inferiority; it is the existence of inferiors which constitutes superiority. If one or other be suppressed, equality reigns. Now it is force, war, which suppresses inferiors and consequently equalizes and levels humanity. War is a means of

equalizing, therefore a means to justice. For whoever (and I am one of these) sees in justice only equality, and puts into the idea of justice only the notion of equality, there is nothing more just than force, there is nothing which fulfils the office of justiciary better than war, and really force is the only thing that is just and war the only justiciary.

A rather stifling conclusion, a rather disturbing turn of logic at first sight. It is the idea of justice, undoubtedly originating from consideration of the unmerited miseries of the weak, and ending with the suppression of the weak and the crushing of the inferior; it is the idea of right united with the idea of force and confused with it. It is, however, a very intelligible, very explicable, and, I think, sincere evolution of Proudhon's thought. Setting aside his teasing mind and his paradoxical disposition and even, although there is room for thinking of them in this case, the impulses and outbursts of his dialectical passion, it is quite certain that Proudhon arrived at this conclusion, although he set out with the idea of justice. That depends on the way in which he set out. In the idea of justice, we ordinary mortals put always an idea of pity. When we say, "It is not just," we mean always, above all, that there is a great misery, a calamity, whose enormity arouses and distresses us. These two sentiments are connected and indistinct in us, and cannot exactly be disentangled one from the other. Surely also Proudhon is compassionate, as any other; but it is much more his logical instinct than his heart which is shocked at the sight of injustice. This pity for the weak is certainly a part of his horror of injustice; but it is not the source of it. It is truly equality in itself that he loves, and for itself. We have a certain liking for equality because it is a form of justice; and he likes justice only in so far as it is equality, and after having perceived that, properly speaking, it is purely equality. Hence, lacking or almost lacking the sentiment which ordinarily goes with it, reduced to the pure state, the idea of justice becomes the idea of level, and whether the levelling process is made in one way or another, from above or from below, by the suppression of the weak or the strong, I will not say it matters little to the lover of equality, but at least he accepts one of the two solutions

in default of the other, and is not very much hurt if of the two it is the worse which presents itself, so much is he possessed and dominated by the passion for equality.

And he is right! From the idea of pure justice, it is really only possible to infer the idea of equality. The idea of justice pure and simple, comes back to the idea of equality and becomes confused with it.

The simple fact is *that the idea of Justice pure and simple, is a false idea.*

It is based on the idea of right. Now, what is a right? There is nothing clearer between parties to a contract. If one person has promised another a certain remuneration on condition that he performs a certain task, when the task is accomplished, the promise given by the one becomes the other's right. The one has a right to the remuneration because he has been loyal, and if the other refused to give it he would not be loyal. The one has a right to the remuneration because if the other refuses to give it he has lied, deceived and robbed the one fraudulently of his time and strength, stolen from him. The one has a right against the other as against a thief of his house, his garden or his furniture. Between contracting parties there is evident, palpable and quite incontestable right. And justice consists in the respecting of right. Between contracting parties there is justice. It can be invoked, claimed, won, contract in hand.

But in a case where there is no contract, is there right? Not at all. It is by misuse of words that a pretence is made that there can be, and is. It is by a sort of improper extension of the idea of right. Since, in society, we are surrounded, enclosed, by a network of a thousand mutual rights and duties, we are accustomed to see rights everywhere, even where they do not in any way exist. Since, incessantly, almost from the cradle to the grave, we are employed, by virtue of a written or verbal contract, on some work, and as at any moment we claim the right which results from that contract, we believe we hold a right always in the palm of our hand. We cannot imagine we are without right; we believe we are born with one, or several rights. Hence these ideas of the right to live, of the right to liberty, of the right to work, of *a priori* rights, these ideas of

rights coming before any convention and contract, which have no foundation and are nothing but false ideas.

It is just for this reason that those who believed in rights of this kind but who, vigorous and logically minded, wanted to base them on something and to find a solid foundation for them, came quite naturally to suppose a contract at the origin of societies, invented a social contract which put society under an obligation to individuals and individuals under an obligation to society. They realized quite well that rights without a contract were worthless, and in order to have rights they invented the contract.

But it is just their invention which is turned against them. It shows that for "natural rights" to be anything but a chimera or mere rant one must suppose a thing which has never existed, a primitive social treaty which has never been signed and which, moreover, had it existed, would not bind successive generations. It shows that *a priori* rights are just an illusion, whose only foundation is a hypothesis. It shows better than any argument that there is right only where there is a contract and that right between non-contracting parties does not exist. And therefore justice between non-contracting parties does not exist either; or it is simply equality; and who can prove that equality ought to exist between men? Why should it exist? Because it is just. But what is justice when there is no right, and what right can there be without a contract?

No, the idea of justice, apart from contracts, is just a false idea. It cannot be said that men must be happy because it is just, but that men must be as happy as possible because it is good. Misery must be abolished as far as possible because it is pitiable; the burdens of the weak must be lightened as far as possible because they are our brothers. Social intercourse, apart from authentic contracts, must be based not on justice but on altruism. Obligation must be imposed not by justice but by kindness. For the spirit of justice, when not joined with the spirit of kindness, is so dry and so cold that it is no better than a sort of mania for equality, and it can lead, as we have just seen, as much to the resolution to suppress the weak as to the desire to help them. The stroke of genius of Christianity,

in its most ancient, its deepest and most sacred teaching, is to have overstepped, as though disdainful of it, the idea of justice so as to arrive at the idea of charity and to insist on the latter. Justice is not in the Gospel. It is omitted, forgotten, perhaps despised; sometimes it seems as though it is jeered at. To the founder of Christianity it seemed something cold, exact, correct and Pharisaic. He speaks to us only of charity, which, on the other hand, is generous and fruitful and boundless. That is a profound view. Society is and remains organized, harmonized, bound by a crowd of contracts, from that which binds the master worker to his mate to that which obliges society as a whole to protect one person because he has promised to pay a tax to it; and all these contracts are guaranteed by a higher convention, which is called the law; and in all these contracts and conventions it is justice that must reign—that is to say, mutual loyalty in keeping promises—and this is why it has been possible to say that society is founded upon justice. But when one wants to know, not what maintains society but how it must be improved, it is no longer any use to think of, or to investigate, justice; there will be found only false ideas, conceptions without foundation, which can lead, if one has a somewhat paradoxical mind especially, to consequences which will not suit humanity very well. It is to charity, to the spirit of devotion, to the spirit of brotherhood, that one must look. It is these which are the true duties, not only for the individual but for society itself; these are the principles which in their farthest consequences do not risk turning out to be the opposite of what they were.

VI

Proudhon's economic ideas are all founded, like his political ones, on the idea of justice considered as the idea of equality. Only, Proudhon is not only passionately fond of equality but is passionately Liberal too. I have already said to what extent he is an individualist. He wants the individual to be as free, as autonomous, as possible, not to be hindered under the pretext of being protected, not to be oppressed by what protects him. And this presented Proudhon with a contradiction in which he

floundered without being able to get out very easily whenever he exposed his economic ideas. For it is very difficult, in such a matter, to establish equality without renouncing liberty, and to give scope to liberty without renouncing equality, as, I believe, we are about to understand. It seems to me that the lack of import, the incompletion, the *inconclusiveness*, the perpetual abortion, of Proudhon's economic deductions arise from the fact that he can never bring himself to renounce one or the other of these two principles.

Thus, to begin with the question which Proudhon attacked first and which he treated with the most resounding vehemence, he comes across the big social fact, universal since the most remote times, of property. The lover of equality protests against this fact, the Liberal, the individualist, cannot prevent himself from defending it.

The lover of equality says: "Property is theft" [1]; it is contrary to all justice (equality) that one man should have, so to speak, a larger and more extensive personality than another, that he should extend his personality into and over material objects which made him bigger, stronger, heavier, richer in the world than his fellow, who is thus not in the slightest degree his fellow. There has been trespass, conquest, invasion on the part of him who possesses; reduction, contraction, subjection and, in the end, slavery for him who does not possess.

And on what right does the possessor base his actions? On the right of first occupant, some say. But often people are not the first occupant of what they possess. It is by heredity that they fill the place of a first occupant, long since dead. In what and why is preoccupation transferable? Not only must the legitimacy of the first occupation be proved, but also that of the heredity. Now heredity is not legitimate, it is legal. It is just founded on the law, on a present law which can be replaced by another. And this law is contrary to the principle of equality so splendidly inscribed in the constitutions of the world.

[1] This expression, as is well known, before being used by Proudhon, was used by Brissot; also by Henri de Saint-Simon: "Idlers, that is to say thieves." It can be traced further: it is also found in Morelly (1756). It has always been in the heart of those who are not possessors.

Others say that the right to possession is founded on work; one becomes owner of a thing which one has so modified by work that in reality one has created it. Immediately, Proudhon infers " this irrefutable consequence that he who does not work and who makes another work in his place loses his right, to the advantage of the worker; and hence after this there is no longer property."

In whatever way the question is taken, it will always be observed that property is a superiority of one man over others, to which these others do not consent. A superiority not agreed to by inferiors is contrary to democratic principle. It is obviously an inequality, but an abnormal, irregular and almost unconstitutional inequality. It is not the inequality which exists between the elected chief and his electors; it is an inequality of birth, of chance, of Providence, if you like, which gets its right outside of right as we understand it in modern times; it is feudal; it is an anomaly in the present epoch. It must disappear, just as those other institutions like it have disappeared —feudalism and monarchy.

Is it not noticeable that, like them, property has the character of an expedient, of a transitory measure? Men probably began politically with a sort of confused republic, and economically with a sort of vague communism. Chiefs were born of ambition, natural to man, which was successful among those who were the most favoured. But this ambition and the natural superiority of the most favoured would not have sufficed had not the necessity for, or extreme usefulness of, the chief made itself felt and caused him to be accepted. Setting aside the possibility of attacks and incursions by or against neighbouring tribes, this necessity arose from the desire, the impatience, for progress, so natural to all men at all times. The chief, king, duke, baron is a man not slow, halting and recurrent in his deliberations, not slow and mild in his resolutions, useful only for the conservation and upkeep of the *status quo*, but a man of decision, of bold plans, of enterprise; he is an initiative. It is through him that progress is made—change, at least, which is often confused in men's minds with progress, and which is not perhaps a benefit but must be recognized as a need of men. Chiefs are

born to nations out of that need, or rather this need has very powerfully helped chiefs to be born and to get their perfectly illegitimate domination accepted.

It is just the same with property. The owners, capitalists, men possessing much more than the others, were a condition of change, of progress, of all economic innovations. " Since any industrial evolution involves a certain sinking of capital, a consumption of money and time, it was necessary to create leisure and to supply advances for certain men who became, so to speak, the *pioneers of production* (or rather those naturally found themselves in the position of pioneers of production who, on one hand, had been able by thrift to create for themselves leisure and funds, and, on the other, had a taste for business enterprise). In general, mechanical improvements, the application of science to industry, agricultural reforms, the spirit of innovation and invention, come, not from the poor but from the rich ; and not from social initiative but from individual spontaneity." This was the rôle of owners and capitalists. They were chiefs of labour, as kings and dukes were chiefs of political and military life. But they must disappear too, for the same reasons. The political chief in modern societies is replaced by an agent charged with the execution of the common will and not of his own, because with the increase in amount of information, and of ease and constancy of communications, the initiative can come from all. The chief of labour will disappear in the same way because, since association has become easier, labour no longer needs a chief, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise can belong to an association in a way that formerly was impossible to a man.

It should be observed, at the same time, that what legitimized the owner or capitalist—that is to say, this spirit of initiative and innovation—is no longer a property of owners and capitalists. On the contrary, they have become timid, one-ideaed, conservative, stable, and think only of retaining their acquired situations. Just as the feudal politicians ceased to be political and even military chiefs, so the feudal economists have ceased to be captains of industry. As the former disappeared because they had lost what justified their existence, so the latter, having also

lost their justification, must perish. The historical rôle of the owner is at an end.

This is the reasoning of Proudhon, lover of equality.

And Proudhon, the Liberal, the individualist, replies thus.

Individual property is individuality; it is at least with the first signs of individual property that the individual realizes himself and becomes conscious of himself. The deepest misery of the working class and of slavery, their greatest horror, is the absolute absence of property; because if he possesses nothing, man does not grasp his personality, he feels like a child or an animal, and is not sure that he is anybody. A personality cannot be grasped in itself, or only with some difficulty; that requires a certain power of abstraction. It is grasped in its extension, in that which, by increasing it, frames it and renders it palpable. It is all around him that a man can realize himself, saying with the legendary Galatea, "This is still I."

It is quite true that real estate is no longer really property; it is nothing but a superiority over the less well-furnished neighbour: "If inequality is one of the attributes of property, it is not the whole of property; for what makes property a 'delectable' thing, as a certain philosopher said, is the ability to dispose at will, not only of the value of the possession but of its specific nature, to exploit it according to one's pleasure, to fortify and enclose oneself therein, to put it to any use that interest, passion and even caprice suggest. What are possessions in cash, stock in an agricultural or industrial enterprise, a National Debt certificate, beside the infinite charm of being master of one's own house and fields, under one's vine and fig-tree?" Thus property is not only a natural tendency of man, but it is one of his faculties. It is one of the things which distinguish him from the other inhabitants of the universe. "I know quite as well as anybody that property has its roots in the nature of man and in the necessity of things."

Thus Proudhon protests against himself when the energetic and even unyielding individualist gets the upper hand in him.

Especially when he comes up against the systems which are clearly destructive of property, communism and collectivism, his aversion becomes extreme. A moment ago we saw how he

found a sort of communism *based on equality*, but communism all the same, in real estate property. In collective property, he finds an even more distressing disappearance of individuality: "When work, exchange and consumption are carried out in perfect independence, this condition is considered the best possible; when work is executed in common and consumption remains private, this condition is less good but still endurable; it is that of most workers and lower officials; when all is made common, work, organization, receipts and expenditure, life becomes insipid, tiring and hateful. Such is the anti-communist prejudice, a prejudice which no education can shake, which is even strengthened by education so that it is impossible to discover how this education could change its principle, a prejudice in the end with which communists seem as much imbued as proprietors." Man feels his dignity and even his person vanish in a communal organization, whatever be the extent of its development and from the moment of its inception. "*Community of things makes my person common*," he says, finding thus an admirable formula: "I am much purer, freer, more inviolate when my community with my fellows is distant, as, for example, community of sun, of country, or of language. On the other hand, I feel much more profane and less worthy when that community is closer, in the manner of Plato."

Thus speaks Proudhon the individualist, and never, perhaps, has the jealous love of personality, of Liberty, of self-possession been expressed with more vigour and penetrative precision.

And between these contrasting tendencies and needs and contradictory protests what conclusions was Proudhon able to reach? Really he came to no conclusions. It is quite evident that he wanted the disappearance of property on the over-large, over-extensive and improper scale; and that he wanted the retention of small property, the garden, the vine and the fig-tree. He wanted the retention—and in this he was very logical—of the property which merely extends and satisfies and confirms the personality; and he wanted the disappearance of the property in which personality is drowned, dispersed and no longer recognizable. This is accurate. The big landlord, possessing immense areas, can no more recognize himself in the realms which bear

his name and on no part of which he has left his mark and impression, since he cannot invest it with his close and intimate affection, than the poor wretch who possesses nothing can recognize himself in anything whatsoever under the sun. And it is certain that Proudhon remained attached to property only in so far as it is an extension of the personality—that is to say, restricted property.

But it certainly is not easy to fix a limit nor to find the right by which that limit can be fixed, and Proudhon did not find either. His clearest idea—I will not say his conclusion, but the final word he has to say on this matter—is to be content to say that there must be means of restraint and of establishing equilibrium: "Property without counterpoise, without some device for its regulation, ends just where I said, and becomes robbery and plunder. This is the situation of our present-day society. It is for this reason that I look for a counterbalance in the creation of social and mutual guarantees." But he did not find this counterbalance composed of social and mutual guarantees and all his ideas on this subject simply lead to the general view that the best and most beneficial sort of property for humanity is that which is the most divided—a rather disputable economic axiom, by the way, and anyhow not very original.

We will find the same struggle of Proudhon with himself in his studies of labour and exchange. Perhaps I am wrong to say *struggle*. Proudhon's mind is so alive and the play of ideas is so captivating for him that contradiction is a pleasure, a violent and somewhat sharp joy, the intoxication of a passionate conjurer. Let us say rather that the two Proudhons play at exercising their skill and strength against each other in this new arena as in that which we were discussing just now.

On the question of labour, Proudhon is most struck with what he calls, in a very happily imagined expression, *the industrial anarchy*.

It consists, as is known, in this: nothing in the present state of things indicates, or orders, or establishes, the amount of production, the amount of useful work to be done nor, consequently, the value of labour. A person works at a difficult and

delicate job. What will it bring him? What is it worth? It depends upon the need that is experienced for the articles when finished. At a moment when there is demand for it, it will be worth much, because there will be a kind of auction for it and it will be given to the highest bidder. When it is offered, it is worth little, perhaps nothing.

It is true that the worker is employed by a captain of industry, by a boss, who promises him a fixed wage, either time-rate or piece-rate; but that is illusory, because the chief himself does n t know what will be the value of the finished work a week hence; and, consequently, his promise, even if he keeps to it, can hold good only for a very near future; and if, after some time, there is no demand for the work, he will make no more promises to the worker, who will get no more than a third or a half of what he is promised and given to-day.

This is absolute insecurity, and it is the strange thing about any work that it can be the same in itself, the same as regards muscular or mental effort or time employed, and yet the return for it, its value when put upon the market, is variable. There is in this nothing regular, normal, equitable and just, nor, so to speak, real. It could be said that labour and time are not real things, are mere nothings, which are taken for something only at times and according to circumstances. And yet it is by such empty shadows, such phantoms, sometimes existing for no obvious reason, that a man and his dependents live, and they are the only means whereby he and his can live. It is shocking. It means that we walk in the dark, we grope like blind people; it is anarchy.

Here is another aspect of this anarchy, not less frightful. To avoid this inconvenience of the insecurity and uncertainty of the value of what they do, men have reduced their hopes in order to increase their daily certainty. They put themselves in the pay of a captain of industry, who promises them, for example, for a whole year a fixed wage. That gives them a little more security, but, first of all, obtained at a sacrifice, and then, again, illusory.

It is obtained at a sacrifice, for the employer will not pay for the work what it is worth to-day, nor what he supposes it

will be worth to-morrow or the day after to-morrow, because he is making an advance that he does not want to make free of interest; because he wants to ensure against the risks he is running if his forecasts of to-morrow's labour-value are proved to be wrong; and, finally, because he takes advantage of the situation to make a profit.

It is illusory, because the employer is no more sure than the ordinary worker of the value of labour, however well informed he be, since value is always in the darkness of the future. In this uncertainty he will always be drawn in two opposite directions: by the fear of not producing enough and of missing the occasion when the finished article would have great value and, thrown plentifully upon the market, would enrich him; and by fear of producing too much and finding himself in the position of being forced to sell the goods at a loss to get rid of them, and thus ruin himself.

But it should be observed that this second fear is always weaker than the first. In the first place, the desire to get rich is always greater than the fear of being ruined; then, the risks are not the same. If the employer has over-produced it is not necessarily ruin that awaits him; very often it is merely a stoppage of work: he has over-produced, so he says to the workers, "Stop work," and he waits for the goods to go off; it is a loss, not a ruin. In the other case he becomes rapidly and wonderfully rich.

The employer has therefore always a tendency towards over-production: it is quite a good industrial rule. Too much over-production is stupid, but to produce a little too much is necessary. It is the means of being prepared, not only for good occasions—a thing with which a producer can hardly be reproached—but for doing credit to his good name when the demand is increased. There would be a kind of humiliation in being caught napping. Over-production is, then, a rule of industry.

But, then, unemployment is also a rule! If there is always over-production, the moment must obviously come when the demand ceases, when goods are held up and work also must stop while the worker waits. That means unemployment and

the worker without means of livelihood. So, through having put himself in the pay of an employer to create for himself a security, this worker is not very happy. He has diminished the daily insecurity to assure for himself at any given moment the certainty of misery. He has accumulated into the period of unemployment all the misery which would have been scattered throughout a year and so lighter to bear. He has capitalized his poverty. And he does not know, he cannot know, and can never foretell, when he will receive this strange capital. It is absolute chance, anarchy.

There is not only anarchy in the modern industrial world; there is barbarity in the true sense of the word, a return to the savage state, or, if you like, the savage state has been preserved in it. The law of the division of labour is the chief cause which produces or maintains this barbaric state. When it was discovered, with much reason, that time and capital were economized by giving to each worker a part only, and always the same part, of the work in hand—for example, by giving to one the blade of the knife, to another the handle, and to a third the job of putting them together—a great facility and rapidity of production and a wonderful cheapness were achieved. But a class of men was made who, properly speaking, are nothing but machines, and who, although *manufacturers*, do much less *manufacturing* than peasants, savages or even beavers.

Let this be so, although it is an alarming situation for the future of races, and it is never good to call for no efforts of intelligence or invention from successive generations of a certain class. But, what is more, these men, by becoming machines, have been turned into slaves. Can they carry on an industry personally, freely, at their own risks and perils? *They have no industry*: they have only a fragmentary manipulation, in small parts, capable of being adapted to an industry, useless and unproductive by itself. And if they had a complete industry, *in integro*, they could do nothing at all with it, for, since the division of labour has just the effect of making production cheaper than isolated integral labour, they could not contend, isolated, by integral labour, with the big business opposite which employed divided labour. They are then obliged, however apt they are, to labour under the

divided system and lose their aptitude. They are slaves of big industry, and bound to their wheels as the slave of former times to his soil.

All this "seems to have been arranged for the enslavement of the worker. After labour has been divided and subdivided infinitely in the interests of production, each of these parts has been made the object of a particular profession, from which the worker, enslaved and dulled, finds no escape. Politically enfranchised by the Revolution, he becomes again a slave in his body, his soul, his family, for successive generations, through the vicious and obstinate distribution of labour."

There is nothing more curious and, at the same time, more melancholy than this evolution of labour among men. Division of labour was fashioned to enfranchise them and ended by enslaving them more. It was invented in order to prevent the necessity for each to provide all the needs of his life, to be for his own service hunter, tailor, carpenter, mason, bootmaker, and so on; it was found more advantageous that one man should be mason for all, another man baker for all, etc.; and it is true that enfranchisement did result from this first division. But, as it is divided more and always more and more, labour puts, not all men, it is true, but a class of men, back into primitive conditions, or rather, into worse than primitive conditions, reducing them to the condition of being pure machines, which do not need intelligence and which lose it in functioning: "Labour, by being divided according to the peculiar law which is the first condition of its fruitfulness, finally negatives its ends." This is what can be called the barbarity of the industrial organization.

It goes even farther. Proudhon warns us that it is not mere rant to speak of slavery in this respect. With the exception (as Proudhon might have pointed out) of the master's arbitrary right of life and death over the slave, the modern worker is just as bound as the slave of old; for he gains scarcely any more freedom by changing from one works or factory to another, and he is always forced to labour at his industry here, there or elsewhere under the same conditions, without ever being able to live in an autonomous way, since he *is part* of an industry but has not an industry of his own, as we have shown. On the other hand,

perhaps he is more oppressed than the slave of old, because the slave of old was his master's property, part of his capital, and had to be kept alive in order that that capital should not be lost, so he was fed, and made to work from terror or under blows, but never threatened with death from hunger, which made of him "an uncertain property difficult to exploit"; while the modern worker—although there may not be the slightest oppression or pressure or bad intention on the master's part—in order to feed himself, and to keep alive, puts up with the most terrible wage-reductions and goes to the extremities of work and of privation, which are placed upon him by industrial competition, precisely because he is owner of his person, the free and sad victim of his freedom, the slave of his liberty.

And Proudhon remarks that in this lies very probably the secret of the abolition of slavery. It was their own interest which must have opened the eyes of the slave-masters of old. They must have understood that it was to their advantage to give the slave his freedom and to "constitute him tenant of his own person." [1]

And here it must be observed that Tocqueville supports Proudhon with a modern example. "Slavery," he says, "which brutalizes the slave impoverishes the master." Observe the right bank and the left of the Ohio. "On the left bank the population is scarce . . . the primeval forest is observable everywhere. . . . Man seems to be asleep. . . . On the right bank rich harvests fill the fields. . . ." On the left bank is a slave country, on the right a country of free labour. "The free worker is paid, but he works quicker than the slave. . . . The black has nothing to claim as the price of his sweating, but he must be fed at all times; he must be supported in his old age as in his maturity, in his unproductive childhood as in the productive years of his youth, in illness as in health. . . ." As a result, production is greater in countries where labour is free, but the free worker is much less happy in his childhood, during illness, in his old age,

[1] There is another reason, which, moreover, confirms this one, given by Dunoyer in *L'Industrie et la Morale dans leurs rapports avec la Société* (1825), and referred to by Auguste Comte in the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, vol. iii., lesson 54.

and much harder worked when he is in health than the slave. In some respects the effect of civilization is to increase barbarity; in some respects freedom but increases the chains which bind: "In a desire for too much freedom and liberty one falls into greater bondage." In truth, is the term industrial barbarity too strong? I do not need to say that Proudhon finds it too weak.

And it is to be expected that, after these gloomy pictures and these vehement denunciations, Proudhon will have recourse to the remedies so often suggested, which seem the only ones which it would be natural to propose, although their efficiency may not be certain and it may not even be certain that they can be put into practice. Against industrial barbarity let us try the regular organization of labour; against industrial anarchy let us try some way of regulating labour and wages. The difference between the affairs of free industry and those of the State is that the former are abandoned to the uncertainties of chance and the severity of competition, while the latter are anticipated, ordered, planned, free from recklessness, calculated according to real needs, screened from the impulses aroused by struggle, and constitute order, not a battle, security instead of a barbarous state, peaceful toil instead of "the confusion of a conflagration." Therefore the State must be made to enter into industry, the State must be made to regulate industrial labour. The difference between the worker and the civil servant is that the latter has not to put up with either the consequences of his employers' lack of foresight, or the effects of their reckless ambition, or the disastrous results of the struggles into which ambition obliges them to enter, or excess of work when there is sudden demand in a certain direction, or excess of leisure and of misery when demand ceases. So, by making industry an affair of the State, by replacing competition by inquiry, by gauging production accurately according to needs, by drawing up the industrial budget as the State budget is prepared, the worker must be made a civil servant. Well, as a matter of fact, Proudhon will not hear of this and absolutely recoils from solutions of this kind.

Here the individualist, the Liberal, is aroused. He does not want any meddling by the State in the affairs of labour, because

the State, although it is a protector, is also a despot, though it is a benefactor, is also a capricious tyrant. It has no interest, or at least no urgent interest, constantly felt, in being served by the best workers. Hence these civil servants who do not work. "There are civil servants who vote; others who sign; others who talk; others who listen, who wander about and watch things being done. Some job hardly enough for one man occupies ten; some man is paid the salary of ten different functions." You expect to escape anarchy by handing industrial affairs over to the State and you find it again in another form: here it is the anarchy of carelessness, of too much security and the lavishing of favours; the anarchy of sinecure. You expect to escape barbarity, and you find it again in a new form; the worker-civil servant represents black labour opposed to white. He is fed, but unproductive and debased; he has neither courage, initiative, dignity or personality; he is in a state of moral barbarity. You expect to escape absolutism and you merely replace one form of it by another. Industrial rivalry was one sort of absolutism, leading, forcing, the worker to exert the maximum of effort on the minimum of nourishment to be able to struggle against his rivals; the State as employer is another sort of absolutism, for, being alone conversant with the work available, it consequently gives it, for a big reward it is true, to its favourites, but for as low a reward as it likes, and even for bread like a slave-master, to all others; and the reward is just as low in the one case as the conditions are good in the other. And such inequality and injustice, inevitable, fatal, so naturally the custom of a despot, and at the same time barbaric, constitute also anarchy. Here is a summary of the economic problem: abstract despotism, in a way impersonal, for which nobody is responsible under the reign of competition; personal despotism, for which the Government will be responsible (but what does that matter if this responsibility is, as it will be, without sanction?), under the reign of the State-employer; anarchy and barbarity in either case.

This is why "economists and socialists alike pursue an end which it is not possible to attain: the first by applying to society the rules of private economy," believing that it is enough to work and save, which in a family leads to comfort, but, practised

by a whole nation, leads through frantic competition to a tremendous over-production, and through over-production to misery: "the second, by applying to society the rules of private brotherhood," believing that it is enough to make everything common and to put one set of people on the charge of another, which in a family, thanks to mutual affection, is sometimes possible and then excellent, but which in a people, since this mutual affection is lacking, is an absolute illusion, would slacken all energy, would turn the most energetic people into sleepy-heads, and would lead by a sort of cachexy to universal misery.

How can these contradictions be resolved? Proudhon tried to find out. To him it seemed that the very basis of the social question was this uncertainty of the value of labour, of which we spoke above, and that this uncertainty could be made to end.

To determine the value of labour all that would be necessary is to ascribe to it a fixed price, an invariable figure. An hour of work is so much, always so much, and it can be neither more nor less. An article, which takes the worker, working according to the latest and most perfected methods, so many hours' work, is worth a definite sum. Its value is fixed until some new improvements permit of its being done in fewer hours, when its value is depreciated. But the unit of value does not change; the unit of value is always one hour of work. Hence uncertainty and insecurity disappear; the producer is no longer in the position of not knowing whether what he produces is worth something or nothing. Competition disappears, or it becomes nothing more than pacific emulation for progress; there will be a desire to produce articles in as few hours as possible, but there will be no thought of being overwhelmed or of overwhelming workers with an immoderate number of hours. This was done when it was not known what was the positive remuneration represented by an hour, so that the worker should be sure not to gain less than the pay necessary for a living. It was done to assure over-production, which was necessary in view of the variableness of the value of goods, to strive in advance against the possible depreciation of the article owing to a flood in the market, in this way actually contributing to that depreciation and causing production to go round in a circle. Now all this is going to be

abolished. Workers will work for the number of hours necessary to live easily; this number of hours will be known and observed.

Thus, undoubtedly, there will come moderation in industry. Even so there is still ambition, and there will be men who will want to wear themselves out with the object of surpassing the others. But the real cause of violent competition is not ambition, but need. It is a question of getting from oneself the means to live while everybody else, needing to do the same, helps to depreciate the value of what is produced by the mere fact of producing, and hence the painful efforts increase in violence. The worker pursues value which is constantly depreciating, and by pursuing it contributes to the depreciation. When the value of labour is fixed it will be only a question of acquiring it. Some will want, so to speak, to acquire it twice, to gain their living twice over; but it will be the very small minority, just as in the civil service it is only the small minority which aims at the important posts, while the immense majority, early in its career, is resigned to the happy medium. In any case, value is fixed; it is fixed by the number of hours employed in making an article; it is remunerative; every worker is sure of the morrow.

This is the only clear conclusion I find in Proudhon. It is always to this that he comes back, and thus he thinks to place himself between the economists and the socialists, repelling them all, needing neither the State nor communism on the one hand nor competition on the other, and suggesting an original and sufficient solution.

It is certain that it is no solution. Who will fix this value that is to be fixed? Proudhon never says. "The value must be fixed. . . . When the value is fixed . . .": this is what can be read all through the *Economic Contradictions*, and one is always expecting to find Proudhon coming to the *how* and the *by whom*, but he never does.

As a matter of fact, although he does not want either competition or the despotic economic State, *he would need precisely one or other of these* to "fix the value."

It is competition which fixes value! The value of an article is determined by the need there is for it and cannot be determined in any other way. An article is not a thing in itself, and its only

worth lies in the fact that energy and time have been employed in its fabrication. An article is the answer to a need that wants satisfying. If this need exists, the article is of value; if it does not exist, the article is a mere nothing. The fluctuations in supply and demand are therefore the only guide to the value of the article; its real value is nothing but the mean between the limits of this fluctuation. Therefore it is necessary to know whether this article must be made and how and in what conditions, and to take into account supply and demand which can exist only if there is competition: for if there is monopoly the demand is there but not the supply, and the low-water mark of value is missing. Supply, demand, competition: here, then, is all that is necessary to *know* value. When you want to *fix* it, if all this knowledge is lacking, what can be done?

Now consider the number of hours needed for the fabrication of an article. The number of hours measures effort and not value. A good number of hours can be devoted to an article for which nobody has either the need or the desire. To know whether the effort is useful it is necessary to know whether there is a demand for the thing to which it is applied. Useless effort is honourable, perhaps, but would not be paid: it has no social *value*. The guide, even to the value of effort, is thus again supplied by the demand, and here we are again up against the play of supply, demand and competition. It is supply and demand in competition which *fix for each day* the value of the article for exchange, which is the same as saying that that value will remain variable.

If this value must be fixed it is to the State that we must look, and we must accept the State as master, and sole master. The monopolist State will be able to establish a fixed value. It will even be able to establish it as arbitrary, as it does for the cigars which it sells (in France). It will be able, if it likes, to establish it on the basis of the number of hours of labour. It will be able to do whatever it likes. But it is the State-master which Proudhon does not want, and in which he finds and points out so many vices.

It is no good to say that, in thus fixing the value of goods, the State is only acting in a legislative capacity: for the law-making State is the same as the State as master. But what will it take as the standard for fixing values? Will it fix them according to the

indications of supply and demand? If so, it will have to let competition give the lead and itself follow. Hence, becoming merely a registrar of the results of competition, it will be useless and might as well leave things as they are under the competitive system. Or will it fix the value according to its taste, humanity, interest or caprice? In this case the worker's uncertainty, to which we are trying to put an end, becomes greater than ever. Industry will not want to undertake anything, since it will know less than ever what will be to-morrow's value for an article made to-day. Gradually private industry will disappear and the State, forced to fill up the gaps it will leave, will become even quite quickly universal employer. Although he never would admit it, Proudhon, after having ruled out the reign of competition, was pushed towards State socialism, and, in spite of himself, forced to adopt it.

He might object that his principle of the number of hours employed, with the hour as the unit of value, has been overlooked. He wants neither competition nor the State to fix value: but the work, the amount of working time employed in making an article. For this reason he believed that he took up a position between competition and the State. But the hour, properly speaking, is variable as everything else. As regards the amount of work it can contain, an hour is elastic. One worker will produce in an hour ten articles of a certain nature, another twenty. To fix the value of this article the basis presumably will be the work of the latter, and it will be said that the article's value is a twentieth of an hour. This fixation will be decreed, but to-morrow will come a worker who will make twenty-five of these articles in an hour, so that his hour will be counted to him as an hour and a quarter; and here is competition beginning again. It is not worth while going on with such a system, because competition will be as great and overwhelming as under present conditions. Of course, it could be said: "No, it is reasonable only to make twenty of these articles in an hour: I will always count this article as a twentieth of an hour." But then progress would be arrested, there would be no improvements either of staff, machinery or organization. Once more the choice lies between the acceptance or not of the competitive system. If it is

accepted, it does not matter whether the basis for value is the article itself or the time devoted to its making; in either case competition will play its part. If it is not accepted, in trying to find a basis for fixing value, the State-employer is created; the State will fix, according to its pleasure, no longer the article's value, but the value of a working hour; and industry, as we have shown, will be abandoned, relinquished, will give up its place to the State as master.

On a final analysis the choice always lies between competition and the State-employer. Proudhon's individualist tendencies and his tendencies as a lover of equality prevented him from making this choice by drawing him in opposite directions, and thus he worked out an intermediate solution which is only an apparent solution.

This duality of his nature can, I believe, explain in every detail all his economic considerations, and why he never arrived at any satisfactory conclusion. It explains also why there are in his works arguments so varied, ingenious and penetrative on all aspects of different questions. Besides being extremely intelligent and full of dialectical resources, he had very deep seated in him these two opposite and contradictory principles, and, according to the way he looked at them, he had only to draw conclusions from one or the other to supply excellent ammunition for one party or another. This is the reason why he seemed to be a sophist. Sometimes in controversy he is, but at bottom he is not. He is *double*, without any of the unfavourable meaning which this word implies; he is essentially double. He has two poles. He is an economist with a dread of the effects of competition, and a socialist dreading the omnipotence and even the interference of the State. He is especially an economist who is in revolt against himself, a man who knows admirably the play of economic forces, who knows whither they lead and who recoils before these terrible consequences without ever wanting to have recourse to the remedy, worse than or equal to the evil, of the tyranny of the State and a universal civil service. Hence it follows he has not found a solution. But he is most distinguished from all the French socialists who preceded him because—and for this he often praised himself—he has not an atom of mysticism nor even

of idealism, in the current sense of the word. He did not for a moment think of changing human nature, which all preceding socialists wanted, more or less consciously, to do, or which their systems obliged them to do in the first place in order to be practicable. He himself is very positive. He does not call for either brotherhood, or sacrifice, or love, or even altruism ; he does not count upon them and boasts of having no need for them ; and it is even against those who base their system on brotherhood that he turns the most bitter and most superb raillery. He sought a mathematical law whose application might establish in the economic world equality and justice. It is doubtful if he found it.

VII

Proudhon is one of the biggest agitators of ideas that this century which is coming to a close has seen, and one of the most suggestive, or, rather, inspiring. His influence was great, at least in so far as he aroused and excited the minds of men and acted, so to speak, as a ferment. He gave the impression in the first place of having very comprehensive, though often confused, information ; then of having such power of argument and logic that it was impossible not to follow him or try to refute him, impossible not to give him consideration, and ridiculous to scorn him. Also of all French sociologists he was certainly the most read. Even his digressions, enormous sometimes and, you might say, monstrous, if they had not been the result of his passion, of his " obstinate consistency," as Saint-Simon said, would have been a sign of cleverness. They not only refreshed the reader, as Proudhon knows how to refresh, by a violent change of exercise, but they refreshed and amused the mind too. His attacks, his charges and his furious assaults, which scandalized by their brutality, were not without beauty as the manifestation of a rare and extraordinary force.

As a reporter and critic of the various systems he remains very valuable, on condition that he is controlled, and his work in this respect remains a library and arsenal.

In the matter of dogmatics his legacy is very small, and, not his conclusions, but those which the reader draws from his

books, are sadly negative. Scherer wrote an article about him to which he gave the title "The Bankruptcy of Socialism"; and it is not only the bankruptcy of socialism which seems to result from this great inquiry and these thousand discussions; it is the bankruptcy of both socialism and political economy, a demonstration of the powerlessness of either to put an end to, or even relieve, human misery: from which one might be led to believe that there are, perhaps, no material remedies which will cure it.

However, there remain two important ideas, which, without either of them being precisely Proudhon's, can be legitimately coupled with his name: the idea that the French Revolution was justice or nothing; and the idea that all revolutions are economic revolutions. These two ideas have not, perhaps, very much in common with each other, but that does not matter. It was good, at a time when the French Revolution was still the object of a sort of fetishism, to find for it a glorious name, and to connect with it a series of healthy and generous ideas, and to persuade its adorers that it should be worshipped and superstitiously respected as justice.

On the other hand, it is false to say that all revolutions are economic in character, "releases of capital," and that consequently true history is the history of political economy, and historical philosophy the knowledge of economic conditions at different epochs. There are moral forces independent of needs; there are national or human upheavals independent of the redistribution of wealth; there are religious revolutions—that is to say, almost entirely moral ones. But in the end there is quite a lot of truth in Proudhon's axiom, and at any time when religions have not been very strong, or when the religious instinct has been rare or *individual*, revolutions have been of a purely economic character. They were so in ancient times; I mean in the short period of antiquity that we know: they were so, and are, in modern times; and they will continue to be so more and more, in the opinion of those who believe, willingly or unwillingly, that in many respects we are going back to the moral and even social state of antiquity. In any case, revolutions have certainly this character nowadays, and it is probable that they will keep it:

which proves at any rate that, without going so far as to say with Proudhon that "politics is nothing at all," the study of social questions is the most important of all at the moment, even if the result of such studies is only to provide expedients instead of solutions, and palliatives instead of remedies.

SAINTE-BEUVE

SAINTE-BEUVE

I

To say that he was an ugly man, sensual, very inquisitive and extremely intelligent does not fully describe Sainte-Beuve; but these are the four essential qualities which characterize him in all his aspects and proceedings.

In 1824 he was twenty years old, had been well educated and passionately desired three things: worldly success, literary fame and to understand all things. He had no beliefs and few, if any, convictions. In this respect it is possible, and even plausible, to be mistaken without being entirely wrong. It is frequently said that first he professed the narrow and dry positivism, called at that time sensualism, of the school of Cabanis and de Tracy; that later, as a result partly of the influence of romanticism and partly of the growth of his mind or his heart, he came under, sought even, the attraction of Catholicism and acquired religious sentiment; and that, finally, as happens quite often with people, he returned to the sentiments of his youth and to a pure agnosticism in regard to everything that cannot be inferred from observation alone.

This evolution did not occur. It existed only in appearance. It will be said with some truth that, in such a matter, a thing which appears to exist must have some basis in reality: but all the same this evolution did not occur. It is necessary to read very carefully *Voluptuousness*, which, as far as moral analysis is concerned, is a pure autobiography, to understand fully that, from 1824-1834, and even later, Sainte-Beuve had only tastes, and that these led him simultaneously in all directions.

Tastes of all kinds entered simultaneously into his soul, and remained there. The chief character in *Voluptuousness* is seen to occupy himself simultaneously, or at very short intervals, with medicine, natural history, sensualist philosophy, deistical philosophy, mystical philosophy, to dream of Port-Royal or "Society at Auteuil," to be the disciple of Lamarck, of Cabanis, of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, of Saint-Martin, the "unknown philosopher," *and even of Saint-Cyran.*

All this he did between the storms of an ardent and timid, and therefore doubly ardent, youth. From the intellectual, as from the moral, point of view he is an example of restless dilettantism. He wants to love everything in order to understand it. He has a tremendous intellectual and a terrible sentimental inquisitiveness. He does not set out with any conviction nor does he tend towards the acquisition of any. He would like to hold them all in turns, for he knows very well that, in order to get below the surface of a thing, one must love it, or rather have loved it, passionately, and then have detached oneself from it in order to judge it calmly.

And it is not correct to say "in turns." He would like to hold all convictions simultaneously, so as to penetrate simultaneously all the objects of intellectual activity, and to experience simultaneously all conditions of the soul. It is true to say that he has no beliefs since he has *no preferences*.

Such a mental training leads to, and is at the same time the result of, scepticism. It is the result of scepticism, for it is not merely a method, and in this case there can be no question of methodical scepticism. It is easy to see that scepticism is no casual or provisional condition for Sainte-Beuve; he remains there too long and delights in it too much, and, above all, he does not seem to aspire to get away from it, or, if he does get away from it, it is only to begin over again.

And this mental training leads to scepticism just by reason of its infinite variety. It is one of the miseries of the human state that what ought to lead to a conviction almost necessarily prevents its attainment. To arrive at a general conclusion it would be necessary to know everything. But, for a mere man, to know everything means to know very few things, and at that contradictory things, and consequently to show up his ignorance and give rise to endless uncertainties, so the commonest way of acquiring a conviction is to know little, to seek little, and to set out with a conviction instead of trying to arrive at one.

Sainte-Beuve was at bottom as much a sceptic in 1830 as in 1860. In 1830, as in 1860, he was drawn toward all things in a desire to understand them. Only in 1830 these different

attractions were stronger, as is usual in youth, and were of a more passionate character, which gave to his movements, as he proceeded from one subject to another, the appearance of an evolution.

And it is my belief that probably also about 1830 his outbursts of curiosity were strongest in relation to things as remote as possible from his earliest training and the earliest tendency of his mind. Thus he threw himself with great enthusiasm into Christianity, and his "*Port-Royal* period" seemed to be decisive, because he was showing a very great curiosity about things which he had not even questioned in his childhood and early youth.

Similarly, his taste for romanticism, short but very violent, owed its ardour to the fact that Sainte-Beuve was experiencing a state of mind as far removed as possible from his own nature. Romanticism pleased him as being something essentially new in itself and, above all, for him. He had never supposed, and with reason, that it was possible to have so much imagination, so much colour and so much power in words. Hence astonished curiosity gave rise to an attraction which was bound to last until the curiosity was appeased.

Inquisitive minds are in this way deceptive. Since they are more strongly aroused by what is new—that is to say, by what is their opposite—than by anything else, they are especially attracted by what they fundamentally dislike; and the ardour with which they embrace an object is no measure of their affection, but rather of their dislike, for it. Their reasoning is something like this: "I am a complete stranger to this thing, so it interests me very much; it is contrary to my nature, so I am fond of it; it shocks my inmost feelings, so I love it." And they are interested in and fond of a subject until, having well probed, well understood and exhausted it, and having deprived it of its novelty, they no longer find in it this reason for liking it and have only their personal reasons for disliking it.

This is the explanation of certain of Sainte-Beuve's "love-tastes," such as Saint-Simonism, republicanism, socialism. These were transient tastes, which lasted long enough for him to understand the matter in question and to detach himself from it when

he had understood. And in this, if you will, lies Sainte-Beuve's "evolution."

These outbursts of curiosity—which could be taken for sympathies and almost for enthusiasms—were, naturally, more frequent in his early life than in his later years. As a result he seemed to like in early life many things which he despised later, and thus he seemed, according to different points of view, either to advance or to degenerate, or to be a free-thinker, a renegade or a heretic. Really, he was at all times the same, inquisitive, and nothing but inquisitive, with no belief that his curiosity would lead him anywhere. Only he was most inquisitive early in life and in respect of things remote from himself; and less so later on and in respect of things more consistent with his own nature.

And this is an evolution, but of character, disposition and habits, not of ideas and beliefs.

From beginning to end of his life Sainte-Beuve was at bottom an observer and an indefatigable investigator of documents concerning mankind. His essential, or at least his most important, quality consisted in an intelligence which never tired of understanding and which sought incessantly new things to understand.

Side by side with this aspect of him was the man of violent passions and fiery sensuality, who was less interesting but of whom some mention must be made. This man in the end was not very different from the other. Here, again, curiosity played an enormous part. Just as he was incapable of fidelity to a doctrine, so Sainte-Beuve was incapable of loving a woman and too much inclined to love them all, and he was eternally led to marry one after another in order to know them. In so doing he experienced conditions of the mind and soul which were apparently always new, and always fresh occasions for observation and reflections.

But in this case it was not merely a game and also it was more dangerous to play at.

It was not merely a game. As he was very passionate, not particularly endowed by nature with the gift of attracting, conscious of this fact and pained as a consequence, horribly jealous, his pretensions, deceptions and ill-feelings influenced his judgments and his criticism, and this is why I am forced

to mention this subject. They often made him unjust and spoiled the accustomed sureness of his taste.

I said further that it was a dangerous game to play. Multiplicity of sentimental experiences does not wither the heart alone. It somehow contracts the intelligence itself. None of the human faculties can function fully in a person who does not follow the normal course, both natural and social, marked out by the conditions themselves in which humanity lives. This is true for all men, perhaps especially for the critic. The good critic is a man whose intelligence is always alert, quick, comprehensive and sure. To be all this the intelligence must not be the slave of anything else. When it is subjected to perverse habits, anxiety, anguish, bitterness and sometimes the despairs which these habits bring with them, it will perhaps preserve its lucidity, but not its elasticity, its ability to soar freely, nor even its amplitude. Some of Sainte-Beuve's reflections on this subject are instructive, and terribly so. "At a certain age, if your house is not peopled by children, it is filled with manias and vices. . . ." "O, to ripen, to ripen! . . . one gets hard in certain places, rotten in others; one does not ripen."

These fatal manias, these vices and their natural consequences, such as failure to ripen, failure to contribute to regular evolution, "living according to the dictates of a troubled soul," and sometimes of a depraved one, failure to find inward equilibrium, consciousness of a soul hardened in certain places and incurably weak in others, like a delicate machine, one part of which is worn out and the other rusty; all these were experienced by Sainte-Beuve, and both he and his talent suffered as a consequence. Towards his end, and really too early in life, the elegance which he so loved deserted him, and a certain dryness became more and more noticeable in his manner. His youth quickly faded. It is singular, but very true, that the quickest way to lose one's youth is to prolong it.

But enough has been said on this matter. Briefly, the great critic of the nineteenth century was characterized by an indefatigable, intellectual curiosity; a fundamental scepticism, which included curiosity, eagerness, and even sympathy, and lacked only enthusiasm and the anxiety to reach conclusions; a taste

for truth, which was only a form of curiosity carried, perhaps, to the farthest possible limits. But these faculties or mental characteristics, excellent on the whole for criticism, were spoiled to a certain extent by moral weaknesses, which were not without influence upon his mental health. Let us see to what use, in spite of his deficiencies, he put his talents.

II

In the first place he was not solely a critic. His ambition was twofold : he wanted to be at the same time a critic and a creator. To write verse, to make novels, and to appreciate other people's verse and novels—such was his programme. It was practically the same as Voltaire's. There is nothing more creditable than so high an ambition. There is nothing even more exact. To be a good critic one ought certainly to have practised all the literary arts and thus know their secrets. A critic's difficulties are great. If he appreciates other people's writings without having been himself a creator, he is not much acquainted with the technique of the literary art, and, if he does not judge by pure impression or by general rules, he produces *a priori* theories ; and, undoubtedly, the true business of good criticism is to avoid both these pitfalls. If he appreciates other people's writings after having been, and while being, himself a creator, there is the danger that he will think too much of himself and will base his judgment of all other work on consideration of his own : and he will need much virtue to be sufficiently clear-sighted.

Since both methods have their inconveniences, nobody can be blamed for trying at least the most brilliant. This was the one which Sainte-Beuve adopted. From 1829-1837 he made verses and novels and at the same time criticized. The poems, sometimes fairly happily conceived, were only occasionally a poet's verses. He had no imagination, although in his time everybody else had too much. He was prosaic, spiritless and cold, not to mention that frequently he was also dull and heavy. Shall I say, also, that he was too sincere? It is almost correct to say so. Rightly convinced that true poetry is the complete expression of our real sentiments, he put himself into his verses with

absolute *naïveté*. This sort of thing succeeds in the case of a person whose heart is very rich in strong or tender sentiments and whose soul has extraordinary depth or nobility. But Sainte-Beuve was only a man of sensibility, restless, it is true, but ordinary in the extreme, and he was rather too fond of believing that he was being a poet by candidly confessing to sentiments and emotions which were rather vulgar and perfectly well known to everybody. Hence, in spite of some fairly brilliant pieces, these three collections are, frankly, cold, lifeless and tedious, and only a few pages would be worth including in an anthology.

The most remarkable thing about these verses is their contrast with contemporary poetry. Truth to tell, Gautier also, in his earliest collections, made some sacrifices to, or did homage to, the muse of platitude; but, generally, romanticism was romantic, though nothing was less so than Sainte-Beuve's verses. They recall as much as anything the best verses of the Consulat and Empire periods, those of Fontanes and Andrieux, with the inevitable differences arising from their respective dates, and with a richer, or rather fuller, though less clear and less pure, language. And simultaneously Sainte-Beuve, as a critic, was endeavouring to praise the romantic poets, at least Lamartine and Hugo. It is true that his attention was also directed back to the poets of 1800. If he put the finishing touches to the condemnation of Delille, he wanted to save Fontanes and Parny from disrepute. By reading his verses and paying careful attention to the half-secret preferences disclosed in his criticism, what actually happened could be foretold—namely, that Sainte-Beuve would one day be the "renegade" of romanticism, the most refined, the most judicious, but almost the most timid, of the classics, and, naturally, a "misoneist" in regard to yet unborn schools; and this, in spite of the inquisitiveness which never completely abandoned him, and which led him right to the last, though more and more rarely, to attempt various excursions beyond the limits of his own taste.

His novel, *Voluptuousness*, published in 1834, was much more important than his verses. Here, again, he was sincere, he was petty and minute, he was assiduous, and, we are forced to add, he was tedious: but he was more penetrative. Here, again,

autobiography preponderates, but it is done, not with greater sincerity, but with a more serious sincerity, so serious that it becomes almost tragic as a consequence. It is a pity that *Voluptuousness* is a novel much less strong and vigorous and done in much less relief than *Scarlet and Black*: because, if it had been of about the same literary value, it would be an exact counterpart of *Scarlet and Black*. The latter is a portrait of a young man of 1830, and so is *Voluptuousness*. The two pictures are, moreover, entirely unlike, because in 1830 there was more than one young man. Stendhal's is a fanatic, a hero, and a victim of will-power. He is the child, fascinated by Napoléon I., distracted with ambition, and, finally, shattered by the too violent tension of the partly artificial will-power which he has worked up within himself. Sainte-Beuve's is a weakling, a dreamer, a being without strength of will and with a thousand fancies, full of discordant caprices, charmed in turn and simultaneously with a thousand different purposes, always dominated by an unnerving—that is to say, always passive—sensuality, and, finally, imbued to the very soul with that unhealthy melancholy, a sort of innate tiredness which always precedes action instead of coming after it. He is a son of René, haunted by the memory of Chateaubriand, as the other is haunted by Napoléon. The contrast is curious and instructive.

It gives us, above all, insight into Sainte-Beuve's soul. The hero of *Voluptuousness* ends by retiring from active life into the seclusion of a life of contemplation. Sainte-Beuve would have done just the same if he had been able. He did do so as far as possible. He had a feeble soul in spite of his intellectual activity and his capacity for work. The bustle of political life and the restlessness of men always frightened him. There was in him something of the studious monk dreaming of a canonry. His canonry came to him very late, in the senate of the Second Empire, after many agitations and misfortunes, and he lived to enjoy it for only a short time. This " dreamy, emotional and excitable languor," which is spread through the whole of the novel *Voluptuousness*, was the very basis of Sainte-Beuve's soul, into which he always relapsed after the relaxations of either work or disorder. It was his hidden sore, and he experienced,

perhaps, more pleasure in preserving than in healing it. He kept it always.

But, without insisting on these points, it is obvious how important a part Sainte-Beuve's creative works play in the explanation of his critical works. Sainte-Beuve is an "introspect." He likes to watch himself living, slowly, patiently, minutely. The confidences which he gave to the public, and which are rather ridiculous considered as such, are, above all, reports about himself which he wanted to make to himself. In this way is the psychologist born. He begins by studying the nearest human subject which comes before his eyes—namely, himself. Sometimes he never gets any farther. He does not progress when he is very fond of himself and when, although he is inquisitive, his curiosity, since he is studying himself, is limited and narrow, more concerned to examine than to grasp a thing, and not wearied by contemplation of the same object. He does progress when he likes first of all to compare himself with others to get better knowledge of himself: and then to generalize and acquire many documents about mankind. He does not abandon the study of himself, but he carries it on in his *fellows*, in other beings who always betray a little of his secret while divulging their own; and he studies himself from a position within humanity, gaining instruction from his surroundings, placing himself at his time and place and his proper distance with regard to other men. For the psychologist the portrait of himself is always the essential and the centre; the painting of humanity is the background upon which the portrait shows up in every detail, assuming its true aspect by comparison, contrast, intercourse and analogy. Sainte-Beuve continued his auto-psychology in criticism, such as he understood it after about 1835.

III

There is nothing more true than to say that when a tendency reaches the limit of its direction it is transformed and becomes the opposite of itself. So, when Sainte-Beuve abandoned creative works, and threw himself wholeheartedly into psychological criticism, he continued to study himself and also gradually

became detached from himself. He "depersonalized" himself, if I may be permitted this word. A director of conscience might advise an elegiac poet to do a study of Napoléon I., then a study of Machiavelli, and so on. This is one way of getting out of oneself. The reasons which led Sainte-Beuve to undertake solely criticism were threefold: first, and without a doubt, the relative failure of his creative works; then, it must be recognized, the exigencies of life; and, thirdly, the great need he felt to discard a "part of himself," which was a burden and, at certain times, a source of considerable sorrow to him. It was a detachment and, like any detachment, a method of purification.

Since his natural curiosity was keen, this detachment was relatively easy for him, and was also advantageous. He grew accustomed to finding as much pleasure in the observation of other people's lives as he had had satisfaction in the contemplation of his own living. Thus he relieved himself of the exquisite pain of living with himself. His examination of other people acted as soothing drugs to his person.

This is no contradiction of what I wrote above. A tendency which has been developed until it refutes itself does not go so far as to annul itself. Sainte-Beuve never succeeded in completely losing sight of himself. In the first place, he was always a psychological critic, which meant, as I have said, that he did not depart from his original state of mind. It meant that he who had been fond of giving confidences now received them, and he who had made confessions became a confessor. This all comes within the same category of ideas. Then, it is curious to see how, whenever Sainte-Beuve studies a man who in one way or another is something like himself, he manages to introduce himself into the discussion. At frequent intervals, in such circumstances, he puts in one of Sainte-Beuve's expressions on the same subject, one of Sainte-Beuve's reflections on the same question, or a few of Sainte-Beuve's verses on the same matter. Of course, he does not mention himself, but there are a thousand indications which prevent the reader from making any mistake. It is almost a mania, but it is sometimes quite unpleasant. Even in the midst of the purest detachment there are always many things which keep us attached to ourselves.

Nevertheless, he made a big effort to practise his profession of critic loyally, impartially and courageously. It is time to examine in detail his procedure.

Ordinarily a critic is supported by a certain number of general ideas and guided by a method. Sainte-Beuve had no general ideas and hardly had a method. I have said that he was a sceptic. There is no such thing as an absolute sceptic. People are sceptical in regard to anything which does not concern the matter in which they are interested, and they become very dogmatic in regard to anything concerning that matter. Sainte-Beuve is a sceptic so far as his own religion is concerned, inclusively. The depth of his scepticism is revealed by the names which he gives to it. He lavishes on it "flattering names." He calls it good sense, sense of reality, judicious spirit, spirit of prudence, reason. Right from the beginning he adores the recognized gods of scepticism, Montaigne, Gabriel Naudé and, above all, Bayle. The following is, roughly, Sainte-Beuve's theory of civilization, which is to be found scattered throughout his works. Most probably progress does not exist; but if it does exist, it consists in a continual increase in the gentleness of manners. This gentleness arises, and can only arise, from tolerance. Tolerance cannot arise from anything but scepticism. Man cannot hold any strong beliefs without wanting with all his strength to force others to hold them. His aggressiveness varies in proportion to his conviction. Scepticism is, therefore, tolerance, gentleness of manners, civilization and progress; and these, on a final analysis, are nothing but scepticism. It cannot be universal. It cannot, even in a single man, be perfect: but its progress can be taken as the measure for the growth of mutual respect among men, of prudence in the making of decisions, of hesitation in infringing upon others, of relative harmony and concord among mankind.

Sainte-Beuve aims at the imperceptible diffusion of scepticism among men, as others at the establishment of a single faith and the communion of all men in a single faith. To him it seems that this unanimity, which is the secret desire of humanity, could be best achieved by the complete abandonment of any desire for unanimity, by adopting the conviction that we cannot convince

each other, and by the general acceptance of the conclusion that though we can think we cannot reach conclusions. When men can agree to differ without finding cause for strife in their differences, there will be enough agreement among them to produce peace in the intellectual world. For this, it is enough that no one should ever be too sure that he is right. It is in this direction that one's efforts should lie. This is the price of individual peace of mind and universal material peace.

It is also very interesting to follow Sainte-Beuve in his studies and pictures of the great believers. Then all kinds of sentiments conflict in him. Out of curiosity for what is as far as possible removed from him he has sympathy: for among the greatly curious the very keenness of their curiosity turns into sympathy and even passion. His artistic instinct inspires him to admiration; for in these believers he finds a force, an incredible human power, productive of wonderful effects and of sublime acts. His inner feelings prompt him to resist, to withhold himself, to make reservations: "It is none the less true that . . ."—that humanity cannot live in this way, that it is not good that it should try to live so, and that, owing to their excessive height, these are summits to which humanity attains for a short time at too great an effort, and on arrival lacks the air necessary for it. These men are so interesting to study that Sainte-Beuve would be sorry had they not existed; he is happy that they existed, so that he can admire them; but, finally, he condemns them, at bottom, with all his heart.

The whole of his admirable *Port-Royal* is full of these inconsistencies, which make it much more interesting than if it were regularly composed, with an artificial or indifferent unity of style. The reader is conscious of the presence of a man with all his different faculties and varied tendencies in play. But beneath the surface, and as a sort of basis, there are two essential instincts: protesting scepticism and the almost quivering joy in understanding. But still the deepest of all these sentiments is certainly scepticism, the sceptical conviction, if I may express it so, this thought which becomes more and more obvious, strengthens itself, asserts itself, affirms itself through insinuation and finally explodes in the conclusion that man is not made to

be enveloped in this gloom, or, what is the same thing, in this dazzling light which is too bright for him.

It is relatively easy to be sceptical in regard to former beliefs, or, more correctly, beliefs which are out of fashion. What is more difficult is to break through present beliefs, which we seem to breathe in the air around us. Sainte-Beuve was, perhaps, more free from contemporary convictions than from those of former times; for he mistrusted them more. This mental phenomenon is fairly frequent among very learned men. Their knowledge of past centuries leads them to expect to see ideas die out, and thus to consider living ideas as essentially mortal and ephemeral. Yesterday's belief, they say, was the contrary of to-day's, and it died out; in the same way to-day's belief will die out.

> "*Multa renascentur quae jam cecidere, cadentque*
> *Quae nunc sunt in honore.*"

Thus, for certain minds, the present, far from ruining the past, is ruined by it. The past ruins the present especially by being dead, and because it is dead, thus proving that all things must die.

This tendency with Sainte-Beuve is very strong and lasting. He carries his mistrust of beliefs so far as to be extremely mistrustful of general ideas. The general ideas of his time were the idea of progress, the idea of historical philosophy, the idea that history could replace religion as the guiding force of humanity. These *idola temporis* are regarded very unfavourably or very disdainfully by Sainte-Beuve. In 1833—observe the date—he wrote calmly: "And then let us admit that, as a science, philosophy has a decreasing effect upon us; that it is no more to us than a noble and necessary exercise, a mental gymnastic, which should be practised for a time by all who are passing through a vigorous youth. Philosophy has been making fresh beginnings for each generation during three thousand years, and this is a good quality; it poses to us again and again the eternal questions, but it never resolves or reconciles them. . . . In the principal claim of its constitution philosophy reaches no conclusion. Also I will say of it approximately what Paul-Louis Courier said of history: 'Provided that it is admirably well expressed and that there is

plenty of truth in its detail, I am indifferent as to the system and the method according to which all this is set out.' "

The declaration is formal and entirely in the manner of a Bayle. For Sainte-Beuve there are philosophic minds and philosophic works, but there is no philosophy.

And if he " said of philosophy " what Paul-Louis Courier said of history, he could quite well endorse Courier's view of history. It could be said that he lived ceaselessly and voluptuously in history and yet had no belief in it. Considered as a collection of facts, it interested him tremendously; considered as an explanation of facts—that is to say, as a science—it had no interest for him whatever. Nobody denied more constantly the existence of the philosophy of history and of all historical philosophies. He never missed an opportunity of doing so. Guizot, with his theory of a rigorous connexion between facts necessarily arising out of each other, rouses him almost to the point of anger. History is a quite arbitrary arrangement made after the events. It " acquires, after the events, an appearance of reason which is deceptive. The fact is turned into a mental view-point." Granted, and for that reason it is more interesting: whether it is improved upon is another thing. An ingenious comparison made by Saint Augustine is worth recalling in this connexion. Supposing a word from the *Iliad* to be endowed, at a certain moment, with a soul and with life, it will perhaps fit into the line in which it is placed and into the previous line, but not into the whole poem, not even into the whole page wherein it appears. We are this word in the poem of humanity. It is no use our pretending to be something more.

According to M. Mignet everything that happens is necessary. But this assertion is in no way proved. It is strange that we recognize so many things as accidental in the time wherein we live, and yet do not want to recognize the part played by accident in times gone by. Is it not very probable that many things which have taken place might quite easily not have happened? And that others, which now seem necessary and the results of inevitable laws, would have occurred, had not some cause so small as to be nothing more than pure chance prevented them. " In the search for a law is there not sometimes the risk

of forcing it and, so to speak, making it? . . . If man, even man in the mass, sometimes commits foolish acts, it is useless to try to establish the truth of an idea by drawing attention to his triumph in certain centuries. Since, in the end, something must triumph, it is as likely to be some folly as anything else. Now, while the historian, in search of laws, is concerned especially to distinguish and sometimes clothes mistakes in the trappings of reason, foolish acts are concealed under his pen and diminished."

Historical laws are born of reason; they are the rational element imposed upon history by the historian during his investigation, and, finally, placed there by him because his search is not successful. "These are reflections to be kept to oneself," adds Sainte-Beuve, but meanwhile he sets them down in print. They are "not very fertile observations," but he never tires of making them; and "sorrowful legacies of ironical experience," yet they are the results of his own experience and he holds to them. Consequently history for him teaches nothing. It is not a lesson; it is without consequence. How should it be regarded? As interesting facts and groups of facts; for, if it is scarcely evident which are the facts which give rise to others, it is quite easy to see which facts resemble each other, are related, or have the same texture. Therefore it is permissible to discover facts and group them, to make historical investigations and historical pictures. History is work and art, not science—or not yet, and it certainly never will be.

It can be readily understood that, if he refuses to believe in historical laws, he refuses even more to believe in the idea of progress, which is simply one of these laws, conceived by perhaps the boldest of the historical law-makers. His whole thought on this matter is contained in a quotation from Pascal, restated by Condorcet: "Men's inventions make progress from one century to another: the goodness and badness of the world in general remain the same." In a word, he disbelieves in moral progress, which is the only progress. This is the principle, the essential point. Men are divided into two classes: those who believe that the future can be better than the present, and those who believe that the future can be only the same as the present. In other words, men are divided into the young and the mature,

as in Demosthenes' orations. There are those who stay young in maturity, and others who are already too mature in youth. But just as there is one period in life in which we look to the future and another in which our only concern is to preserve as much as possible the advantages gained from the past, so one part of humanity is full of hope, the other is only concerned to preserve; one part believes in progress, the other that the best that be can done is to avoid retrogression. Sainte-Beuve belongs, always belonged, to this last. He is instinctively misoneist. "Progress" for him consists in changes, of which time shows the uselessness and actually effaces the bad effects, whence it follows that, when all is said and done, it is reduced to nothing. "The world sometimes reminds me of a very good watch: everything is done to put it out; but if only it is left in peace to do nothing for a while, it recovers its regular habits of its own accord."

This is pure scepticism, with its qualities of pessimism and discouragement, of natural lassitude and frustration, sometimes even without cause. It has a peculiar nature with Sainte-Beuve, because usually it is a form of, and at the same time an excuse for, laziness, but with Sainte-Beuve it is united with the most violent and most indefatigable intellectual activity. Nobody worked harder than Sainte-Beuve without being encouraged by the hope that what he did might serve some purpose.

And Sainte-Beuve's scepticism is also original in this, that it contradicts itself, as all good scepticism should, that it is sufficiently conscious of the vanity of all things to be conscious of its own. I will not say of Sainte-Beuve's scepticism what Pascal said of Montaigne's, "that it rails at itself to find out if it doubts"—that is a rather far-fetched turn of the imagination, which goes beyond the truth so far as Montaigne or anybody else is concerned. Montaigne does not doubt that he doubts, nor does Sainte-Beuve. But Sainte-Beuve doubts the legitimacy and the good effects of his scepticism. While supposing, as I have said, that scepticism is, if anything, beneficial, he wonders, sometimes, if it is as much so as he believes. His only conviction, "the sceptical conviction," is itself not sound. He says, quite in the manner of Montaigne, and in a style worthy of

the master: "Human life reduced to itself would be too simple and too bare: civilized thought has had to do its utmost to conceal and decorate its barrenness. Gallantry, wit, philosophy, theology itself are only learned and artful games invented by men to pass away and enliven the period, so short and yet so long, of life; but they do not sufficiently understand that they are games." And in the same breath he writes: "Men like Huet know too much. If the world followed their example there would be nothing more to do but to sit still, to enjoy acquired wealth and to live in one's memories. . . . But humanity prefers from time to time to throw overboard a good part of its acquisitions; it prefers to forget and to give itself the trouble, or rather the pleasure, of inventing afresh. After all, it is such ignorant people as Pascal, Descartes and Rousseau who set the world going."

In other words, all human labour is vanity, and all thought simply a pastime. All the same, let us work, think and invent. This is the way the world goes round. But, as a matter of fact, the world does not go round: for inventions arise only on condition that former ones are abolished, so that they can be reinvented and the process begun again. However, let us work, because . . . Well, in truth, the reason is not very clear.

This is absolute scepticism, of the sort which turns its ridicule against itself after having ridiculed everything else, and which says that nothing is certain, not even itself, thus in a way confirming itself by attacking itself.

So Sainte-Beuve writes sorrowfully about the lack of enthusiasm, the narrow positivism, the hard pessimism and dry scepticism of Youth in 1852, and does not seem to suspect that he is one of those who have done most to create this state of mind. "Patrem exterruit infans." The truth is that he does know the effect of his writings. But it is one of those things which do not give much pleasure when they are done. And here we have a last characteristic of this scepticism which was so peculiar to Sainte-Beuve. It was a scepticism, if not insidious, at least insinuating, which spread secretly and almost involuntarily, which Sainte-Beuve would have liked to keep for himself and for those who were in its secret, and he was rather surprised

and almost angry to see that, through his fault or for other reasons, it became suddenly very widespread. In all things Sainte-Beuve had a real sincerity, but discreet and almost dissembled, and his scepticism also was real, sincere, discreet, dissembled and rather frightened of the light of day. It is extraordinary how much Sainte-Beuve resembled Bayle.

IV

He had scarcely more method than general ideas. It could be said that all the efforts of the nineteenth-century criticism were directed towards its constitution as a science; and Sainte-Beuve reacted vigorously against this very effort. Twenty-five years before the coming of Taine, as early as 1829, Sainte-Beuve refuted the theory of race, place and time. This theory, borrowed from history proper by literary history, was beginning to make its first appearance in the world, with Villemain and Guizot. At first sight Sainte-Beuve saw its weak point. He admitted that, as an explanation of great statesmen, the method might be of use: but it seemed to him a rash means of explaining poets and artists. These are often "people of retirement and solitude," and, although their surroundings may have inspired them, it is only true of some that their surroundings have created them. It must be remembered that in art it is only the excellent which counts, and that the excellent is certainly not produced by the mediocre surroundings in which it is placed. Art is exceptional by definition and apparently spontaneous in essence. "You can reason excellently about races or prosaic epochs; but it is at God's pleasure that Pindar arises one day out of Bœotia and that André Chénier is born and dies in the eighteenth century." Therefore it is good to place the artist, not in his nation and his century, but more simply in the circle of his habits and relations, a circle more or less wide according as the artist was of a meditative or a sociable disposition, but always limited.

In other words, good biographies must be made, and Sainte-Beuve will never admit that it is possible to venture beyond this: "To enter into an author, to install oneself in him, to reproduce him in all his aspects, to make him live, be moved and talk, as he

must have done; to follow him as far as possible into his inmost recesses and his domestic habits, to reconcile him completely with this world, with these daily habits on which great men do not depend less than others . . ."—this is what Sainte-Beuve finds useful, fruitful and solid, and what he practised all his life. What he wants is to acquire not only knowledge of, but familiarity with, an author. "One shuts oneself up for a fortnight with the writings of a famous dead man; one studies him, ponders over him, questions him at leisure; one brings him up before one's eyes. . . . Each feature is added in turn and takes its place of its own accord in this physiognomy. . . . By degrees a vague, abstract, general type is merged with and incorporated into an individual reality. . . . The man himself has been found." Sainte-Beuve never defined himself better than in these words. How certainly he is above all a psychologist and moralist! "The man himself has been found."

And herein lies the reason why Sainte-Beuve has so little liking for general ideas and for a method of criticism which requires, and is made up of, general ideas. What he likes is individuality. A person is never sufficiently individual for him; never made up of features sufficiently marked, in sufficient detail, and sufficiently distinct from those which make up other people's individuality. "The greater one's mind, the more original men one sees," said Pascal. That does not express an absolute truth. He ought to have said: "The greater a certain type of mind": for there is one type of mind which sees the difference between men, and another which sees the resemblances; one is analytical, the other synthetic; one can be satisfied only when it has quite penetrated a human being and made him seem, so to speak, the only one of a species; the other can be content only when, by discovering, supposing or exaggerating resemblances, it causes one character to fit into a group, this group into a world, this world into a century, and this century into the general laws of history—that is to say, into a thought.

Of these two kinds of mind, Sainte-Beuve has especially the former and the latter hardly at all.

When he was confronted by Taine he was shocked, without being surprised however, and all he could do to refute him, or

shall we say, perhaps, to mark the distance between Taine and himself, was to repeat in a rather more insistent and more fully developed way what he said in 1829: "Between a fact so general and so common to all as soil and climate, and a result so complicated and so multifarious as the variety of species and individuals which are nourished by these, there is room for a quantity of more particular, more immediate causes and forces, and so long as these have not been grasped, nothing has been explained."

There is another method of criticism, very much in use, perhaps too much, which aims at proving something by using a study made of somebody to uphold conclusions which are dear to us. Sainte-Beuve was too much lacking in conviction of any kind to have the slightest tendency towards this type of criticism. Melancholy spirits could almost give another name than sincerity to the way in which he thrusts aside this sort of criticism and praises the sort which has no intention of proving anything at all and, in truth, no intention of coming to a conclusion: "M. Magnin has a special quality when he discusses a subject and a book, a quality, however, which is very necessary to impartiality: *it is indifference*. I hasten to define this type of indifference, *which does not at all exclude curiosity and conscience*, those two virtues of the critic, and which even gives freer play to them. . . . M. Magnin is entirely *impersonal*, a great quality in his profession. He has no patron saint. . . . Such a neutral disposition has carried him very far." Indifference and neutrality, excluding neither curiosity nor conscience, these are not qualities which Sainte-Beuve always displayed; but he would have liked to have them. Sometimes he succeeded, and finally, with the help of age, he entirely succeeded, in having them. And, added to what precedes, all this amounts to nothing more than complete absence of method.

Sainte-Beuve did sometimes pretend, either for amusement or perhaps out of condescension to those who are very exacting, to have a method like other people. He repeated several times: "I am making a natural history of minds." By this he meant that, having gathered together the characteristic features of a person, he tried to indicate to what family of minds he seemed

to him to belong. He never claimed that there was anything else "scientific" about his criticism. It is little enough. Actually it goes no farther than the devising of ingenious "relationships" between the various fathers of our literature. Tasso belongs to Virgil's family, and Horace and Aristotle are in the same family. There is nothing about such arrangement that is not quite legitimate, fairly useful and barely audacious. With a very accurate sense, if not of what criticism can be, at least of what he himself was, could be and wanted to be, Sainte-Beuve never went further than this. If he had at the outset a clear idea of the part he had to play in this world, he must have said to himself as he set out: "I will paint men: then I will paint other men. I will paint them as intimately, consequently as particularly, and as unlike each other as possible. From time to time I will show that they are nevertheless alike." It is a method, if you like, but one which is in no way a systematic—I had almost said methodical—method.

In default of a method, or of wanting to have a method, he really did have a critical mind, and he knew excellently in what that consists. To love everything in order to understand; to hate nothing; not only to hate nothing but to disdain nothing; to have a sort of intellectual sympathy, the only sympathy which has no contrary and which does not force one to detest one thing because one loves another; to have, always at hand, one of those "intellectual loves," as they said of the lords and ladies of 1630, and to be ablaze with a judicious sort of passion, which does not exclude presence of mind; here is Bayle's spirit and, above all, the "genius" of the real critic.

A proof that Sainte-Beuve has this quality, or comes as near as possible to having it, is that he defines it wonderfully and in a manner worthy of Montaigne: "He goes everywhere along the roads, making inquiries and accosting folk; curiosity lures him on, and he does not spare the refreshment which is called for. He is, up to a certain point, entirely at the service of everybody, like the apostle, and in this sense *there is always optimism in the really gifted critic.*" This is a very penetrative view, which supplies us with a trait of Sainte-Beuve's character as well as with one of the secrets of his mind. We shall have occasion to

return to what we say here in order to modify it; but it is true that curiosity never goes without sympathy, that, if sympathy disappears, curiosity ceases, and that Sainte-Beuve's universal curiosity was in its way a kind of optimism. He loved to know men's secrets, and this desire included at the least a sort of liking for humanity. He loved to watch humanity living, thinking, feeling, expressing its dreams. It did not lay any charge upon him, nor deceive him. He was not tricked. He was only slightly respectful. But sympathy without respect for humanity is, roughly, the definition of Sainte-Beuve's sentiments towards his fellows.

Above all, he was fond of truth. And just as he liked humanity without respecting it, so he liked truth with the thought at the back of his head that it can never be attained; and he loved it with that very particular passion of a person who does not believe in it. He seemed to say that, if truth escapes us, it is precisely a reason for pursuing it. He did not spare his efforts; he had the last quality, the last "virtue," as he said, of the critic, which consists in an absolute loyalty in his inquiry, his discoveries and his mistakes. He is perhaps the only critic who says to us a hundred times at the end of an article: "See what I have written on this subject in such another article. I do not say the same thing there as here. I say, approximately, the contrary." That meant that he never believed he had found the truth, that he searched for it endlessly, that he preferred it to his reputation, and that he was never ashamed not to have grasped at first sight what is impalpable. There is a detestable sort of scepticism which arises from carelessness and laziness; there is another which is active, eager, painstaking, patient, which never expects to die out, which always gives the impression that it expects to be able to get somewhere, which does not believe in truth and yet loves, almost impetuously, the search for truth. This last is perhaps a curious virtue, but truly it is a virtue. Conscience, sympathy, indefatigable and intelligent curiosity, almost refined loyalty, such was the composition of Sainte-Beuve's "critical mind"; thus he made up for lack of method, or perhaps it was because he had qualities which filled its place so well that he paid no heed to method.

V

Supported by this critical mind, so alive, so free, so spontaneous, he gave his attention to the whole, or almost the whole, of literature, to moral philosophy, to history, and he left two big works, confused in his writings, contained one in the other, which it is necessary to be able to distinguish, since they are different and arise from two different turns of mind; on the one hand a series of portraits—on the other an abstract of the different ways in which humanity thinks.

His portraits are more often than not surprising. They are done with the stubborn patience of a painter of miniatures, the restless zeal of a hunter among documents, and the keen curiosity of a director of conscience. The artist in this case yields to the model with perfect docility and at the same time questions it passionately. He does not tire either of contemplating it calmly or of turning it inside out and almost torturing it with inquiries and investigations. He never knows enough about its habits, customs, whims, manias, its relations, family, friends, its surroundings, and incidents, accidents and precedents: and at the same time, or immediately after, he manages to replace his model in the normal attitude of repose in which it is both natural and desirable that it should be seen to preserve the idea of harmony. In this way, his portraits become dramatic, in all and the best senses of the word. They are evolved before our eyes; they are modified; they are given one feature and then another, which is corrected or toned down by a third; they rise up before our eyes; they step out from the darkness, through the dawn, through the dim light of day, until they burst forth in broad daylight, and then sink back into a semi-obscurity, at some point where their biography still defies investigation; then they reappear in the full light of day, and finally stop in a certain attitude which is that in which, until new discoveries are made, it is reasonable to see and know them.

Thus, in these dramatic performances, whose chief aim is to make us know a character, this character passes through various phases, is revealed to us in different parts, gives up his secret

to us bit by bit, leaves us in the end with a full and precise image of him, made up of all these successive features, which have managed to accumulate without effacing each other and to be co-ordinated as they are added to each other.

To make a success of portraits of this kind a superlative art is necessary, for it is not a case of putting a finished portrait before the eyes of a spectator, but of painting as he watches. It is rather, as can be imagined, a case of pretending to paint in front of a spectator; for Sainte-Beuve does not really feel his way, and he knows when he begins which road he wants to take. But this process, which gives the reader the sensation of watching the inquirer and artist at work, this half-disclosure of the hesitations which the artist experiences, or at least has experienced, this process which, moreover, is only half a process and into which there enters much truth, is an exact mean between art and nature, between excess of art and excess of nature, and this is art itself.

In the end, Sainte-Beuve acquired the faults of this manner. He ended up by somewhat exaggerating the corrections, tonings down, the "devices," the "pentamento," the hesitations and the digressions. Even when it is spoiled in this way, there is still charm about this method of writing. In this case we very nearly have Sainte-Beuve at work before our eyes; but there are some workers who work with a facile grace; we see such at work in exhibitions, and they are just as interesting as the result of their work. Of these was Sainte-Beuve.

Thus he left a portrait gallery which is an invaluable collection of documents for the moralist. Physiology takes up perhaps a little too much room in it. Human weaknesses were for Sainte-Beuve more characteristic of Man and of a man than their strong points; or rather, if you will, he believed that men resemble each other by their virtues and are distinguished by their particular ways of being vicious. This is not certain. For whatever his reason, the portraits he made of humanity are not without blemishes and the secret or half-apparent "weakness" is not concealed in them. But they are alive. He reminds one of a Le Sage, without, I will not say naturalness, but simplicity; of a Saint-Simon, without relief; and of both

for his ceaselessly watchful curiosity, his love of life and the secret of giving expression to it.

This secret cannot be defined any more than it can be borrowed. We see the conditions of it but not in what it consists. The conditions of it are intimacy with the model, long and minute inquiry, variety also of successive models; for it is an error to suppose that we can know a man when we are acquainted with only one; we only know each one by comparison with others. As for the secret itself, it remains the privilege of very occasional historians, novelists and moralists, who had the gift of understanding life. In this more than ever is verified the idea which always recurs to the mind when one thinks of Sainte-Beuve and which he himself practically recognized and admitted; he was a half-creator. He had sufficient imagination to permit him to think out on new lines a work which he read and to complete it at need, to reconstruct the moral life of a man who had lived and left some traces of his life; but the work had to have been written and the man to have lived. This creative half-faculty is indispensable to true critics. Always one wants to say of them: "It seems that he could have been a creator if he had wanted." This is just what one can say on reading Sainte-Beuve.

I said that, mingled with this series of portraits, there was a sort of review of the main beliefs and opinions of humanity. We will not record it afresh after Sainte-Beuve. Let us say only that, just as he was capable of painting whomsoever he pleased, so, and even more so, was he capable of understanding everything. A certain passage of his on mysticism, collected by Mme Swetchine and found among her papers, was printed under her name and was considered as one of Mme Swetchine's finest "uplifts," until Sainte-Beuve smilingly pointed out that it was his. On Pascal, on Saint-Cyran, on Arnauld, notwithstanding the reserves he makes, his analysis and his reconstruction are marvels of lucidity, penetration and depth. On the subject of Père Hardouin there is a passage on the evolution of the idea of God which is of surprising simplicity and soundness. From the idolatrous God, to the biblical God, to the Christian God, to the Christian God already philosophical, to

the God finally whose personality melts away in the abstract idea of law, the insensible succession, leading the world from idolatry to atheism and defining these two extreme points between which, in its rises and falls, humanity seems to oscillate, is illuminated by a bright, cold and steady flame which this calm and impassive mind seems to shed without effort and without emotion.

The Christian philosophers he studies (he scarcely studies any but these), often shrewd and embarrassed, are thus treated by him with reference to their fundamental qualities and, so to say, their pure essence; to the two or three exact points which form the centre of their thought, and the more one knows them the more one recognizes them in his analysis, and the more one sees that he has fathomed and penetrated them with sureness and with an almost infallible psychological sense. The taste for unravelling ideas without adopting any of them was with him as strong as the taste for laying souls bare and surprising the secrets of characters. The one led him to the other, and he was always keenly interested in the way men lived, either in their thought or in their passion; but to have had the faculty of seeing the play of ideas as distinctly as the play of the secret springs of the heart is a rare occurrence, and one which indicates as much strength as delicacy of mind, as much depth as expanse.

VI

As a critic in the proper sense of the word—that is, as a man who considers works of the mind and says what he thinks of them—Sainte-Beuve has generally excellent taste. One may ask, What is taste in a man who has neither general ideas in which he believes, nor a method to which he is attached, and who only likes to understand everything? It is very true that taste destroys itself by growing too extensive, is ruined by becoming general, since it must be a discrimination, a preference, and so, ultimately, and even against its desire, an exclusiveness. Taste is nothing but the sensibility of a very delicate mind manifesting in the presence of a work its conformity with, or dislike for, the spirit of that work. Taste is one or other of these conditions: "I am

in my element in what I read and am charmed," or, " I am out of my element in what I read and put it aside."

From this it results that taste can be considered as the very opposite of criticism. Criticism is the analysis of another's mind; taste, according to the foregoing definition, is the analysis of one's own mind in the light of what one reads. One reads and one is charmed. Why is one charmed? Because one is getting a clear idea of oneself, tracing to their origin certain sensations, pleasures or aversions, inquiring into the constitution and even the history of one's mind. It is just the opposite of criticism which consists in getting a clear idea of another's mind and of transforming oneself, if possible, into another to understand him better. This contradiction is real and it would be impossible to avoid it completely. Confronted by modern critics Boileau would say: " Here are critics who possess every quality—knowledge, intelligence, conscience—except taste." Confronted by Boileau modern critics say: " There is a man who does not lack taste; but he is incapable of understanding what he does not appreciate. Is he very intelligent? " There is at least a danger that too discriminating taste may prevent and hinder the critical faculty, that the too active critical faculty may suppress taste, confine it as being a nuisance, and reduce it to silence.

But let us pursue the subject and observe, without pretending that this little contradiction can really be resolved, that in well-ordered minds criticism and taste benefit, in the first place, one from the other, and then are able to mark out for themselves their respective territories and function each in its own.

Criticism and taste benefit from each other. " The mind is formed by reading and conversation, and reading and conversation are chosen according to the mind; so the process goes round in a circle," is, roughly, what Pascal said. This is certain: but, although there is no way of getting out of this circle, it must be realized that it is wide and that it is constantly increasing in width. The original taste is only a trait of our character. This first tendency, without ever changing or becoming the contrary of itself, is modified by our reading of successive things, and retains its original form, but becomes much more supple, much more receptive, much more capable of *making consistent with*

itself things which at first seemed completely foreign to it. Now, when our mature taste has been formed, it is a disposition of our character, modified, corrected, enriched by our reading and reflections—that is to say, by criticism.

And also criticism benefits by taste and is helped by it. If one could imagine a man absolutely devoid of taste—that is to say, of preference—whatever curiosity he might have would be so cold that it would be unproductive. It would cause him to pile up books read without getting any advantage from them, like a miser his wealth. It would be a kind of literary avariciousness and bibliographical covetousness. It would cause him to draw up catalogues and indices. It would do no critical work. Criticism is animated by taste, which tends either to satisfy itself or to extend itself—and this is also a way of satisfying itself—or else to be somewhat offended, whereupon its keenness is aroused and an opportunity offered for it still to enjoy its activity. Taste induces criticism to give it opportunities to admire, conquer or fight—that is to say, always opportunities to act and feel itself in action. Criticism and taste, although opposite in a way, conspire, however, to co-operate, and each is to the same extent necessary to the other.

This is what happens during the period of research and investigation among minds. There is another period, that in which the critic comes to the point of exercising his judgment—that is to say, of giving at last his personal impression, in one way or another. In this case the critic muct be able effectively to silence his critical faculty as such. Criticism has played its part. For some time it has held taste in check, has restrained it, has asked credit of it, has begged it to wait; now criticism must let taste have its say. Sainte-Beuve knew this moment very well, and permitted himself to stop, though never to loiter there. In his desire to understand everything he was not resigned to do nothing but understand. The complete definition of what he wanted to do is to understand everything, to love everything in order to understand, and yet to have certain preferences. And it is easy to believe that Sainte-Beuve's preferences are interesting to observe: for they help us to know the sensitive man beneath the scholar, the " impressionist " beneath the investigator, the man himself

beneath the critic. Here we have no longer the man who wanted to penetrate others, but the man revealing himself.

These preferences show us a mind especially fond of medium qualities and limited beauties. In general, power attracts but does not hold him. He admires it and understands the reason for his admiration, but he does not "taste" it. Greatness of conception, powerful imagination, even natural sublimity of genius, are things which he explains better than anyone else, but which he does not study for preference or even with security. Sometimes in the explanations which he gives one is conscious of effort. His famous pages on *Athalie* are fundamentally correct, but so singularly strained, bombastic, exaggerated, overburdened, that, frankly speaking, they sometimes approach the verge of nonsense. At bottom, he likes most, and always comes back to, the region midway between sensibility and imagination, to grace, charm, sweet melancholy, subdued laughter, moderate love, regret without too much bitterness, all expressed with a natural elegance. Among his secret and intimate loves can be mentioned, of the ancients, especially and without hesitation, the Anthology: the Homer of Nausicaa and Andromache; Virgil, with a grateful remembrance for Apollonius of Rhodes; Tasso rather than Dante; the English Lake poets rather than Shakespeare; *Bérénice* rather than *Athalie*; *Le Cid* rather than *Polyeucte*; and then a great weakness for the men of wit and elegance who wrote verse from the end of the eighteenth century to about 1860. His love for André Chénier is composite of almost all these tastes. He sees in Chénier the neo-Greek, somewhat Alexandrine, rather more than Alexandrine, a combination of Ionian and Sicilian elegance and loftiness; yet loftiness of a regulated and somewhat reduced character, turned into elegance without being deprived entirely of its sense of greatness, a moderation which exactly pleases Sainte-Beuve. Chénier is for him, too, the half-sensual, half-sentimental lover, La Fontaine combined with something of Rousseau, and he recognizes in his effusions an elegance which is scarcely at all studied: and this, again, is the precise mixture, the exact combination, which is entirely in accordance with Sainte-Beuve's nature.

At bottom, Sainte-Beuve is "romanesque." All that this word

implies in its ordinarily accepted sense—a little dreaming, a little love, a little sensuality, much elegance of style, a little nonchalance, a keen mind, analyses fairly delicate without being too precise, rather rare states of the heart—this was just the realm of Sainte-Beuve : all that is usually excluded from the meaning of this word—frank or crude realism, force, depth, logical vigour, strong lyrical imagination, a large outlook upon the world, epical power—these were things which he understood if required, when he wanted, but which were always objects for his intelligence rather than attractions for his inmost being.

His great love for the *minores*, as he liked to call them, can be explained in many ways, some of which are connected with his introspection ; above all, it arose from his liking for all those who did not attempt to fly too high nor to descend perilously into abysses. The big adventurers in art, including those who were successful, are not his business. If we could manage to deprive the words *bel esprit* of the unfavourable sense that they have acquired, and did not always have, we would say that Sainte-Beuve preferred *beaux esprits* to *grands esprits*.

For this there are many reasons, of which the first and best is that it was his nature. Then he wrote most during the romantic period. After having believed that he loved romanticism, this very sheltered scholar, singularly on his guard by reason of his strongly classical education, reacted against the enthusiasms of his times and their peculiar qualities, and, as happens in any reaction, went rather too far in the opposite direction. The contemporary audacity of thought and imaginative irruptions confirmed him, so far as philosophy was concerned, in his scepticism, and, so far as literature was concerned, in his taste for near horizons and " moderate flights." As another said, " O for a little phrase of Mozart ! " he said, " O for a fable of La Fontaine, or even one of Andrieux's stories ! "

And then we must remember his way, or one of his ways, of understanding criticism : " I think two things about criticism, which seem to be contradictory, but are not so : (1) the critic is a man who knows how to read only and is teaching others to read ; (2) criticism is an invention and a perpetual creation." He was teaching the art of reading when he explained the great minds to

his readers. He was creating and inventing when he explained the lesser minds. In the latter case he remade their work, invented and created it afresh; he presented it in a reconstructed form, into which he put as much of his own genius as of theirs. And since he had always had creative faculties, real though weak and condemned to inaction, he indirectly gave scope to them in this process. He had a share in the making of Desbordes-Valmore's poem and that of Parny, as also in that of Mère Angélique. These are his poetical works, and they certainly do honour, I will not say to his imagination, in case I should seem to accuse him of deception, but to that *invention in truth*, that faculty of reconstructing reality, which is still a form, fine and rare, of imagination. And, finally, to return to the reasons why he preferred the lesser minds, it was his nature. He had a taste for the very distinguished medium rather than the great, for the delicate and elegant rather than the strong. That is practically the same thing as saying that he had a taste for exquisiteness. That is a very honourable taste.

VII

Shall I mention his deficiencies and his limitations? It is necessary to do so in order to complete his characterization. We have just seen some of them. He had others, which arose out of his passions, the bad parts of his character. It is unquestionable that he was jealous: jealous of those who had had greater success than he as creators. He did not much like novelists who made more amusing novels than *Voluptuousness*, or poets who made better verses than those in *August Thoughts*. He liked even less those who had been handsome in their youth and had had success with women. Because of this, or at least partly because of this, he did not do complete justice either to Chateaubriand, Lamartine or Musset. In certain autobiographical notes, of which he left too many, this secret wound of the incorrigible and quite often slighted lover bleeds and throbs in a way which arouses pity. From the point of view of the qualities necessary for the making of a true critic I do not know whether there is a man in the world, however virtuous he may be imagined, who

would be truly qualified for this mission. Not only must he be very intelligent, very painstaking, and also half a creator, but at the same time he must be a wise man, inaccessible to envy, malice and weaknesses of the heart. That is asking a great deal! Anyhow, Sainte-Beuve was not a wise man up to that point.

Such a man would be expected to make a day-to-day literary history of a half of the nineteenth century; and this is the part of his task which he did the least well. The big literary glories of the nineteenth century are not given their proper place, their proper rank, in his writings, because he has always some personal reason for not according this rank and place to them. This guide, admirable when he deals with the past, must be somewhat mistrusted when he deals with his own times. Thus he missed real glory. For real glory for a critic is to say of his contemporaries what posterity will one day think of them. Boileau very nearly did this. And Sainte-Beuve very often succeeded himself. Such an article, for example, as that on Béranger, is a case in point, and does great honour to the critic. Béranger was placed so high during twenty-five years, and then after his death fell so low, that he is among those who serve as a criterium of the justness of a critic's mind. Sainte-Beuve's remarks seemed hard when they were written, at a moment when Béranger was still undisputed, but very indulgent at the time of the reaction against the ballad-writer. Read again now it will certainly seem that it is exactly, in every detail, word for word, what we think to-day, what any inquisitive person who decides to go back to Béranger will always think of him.

But such articles on his contemporaries are all too rare with Sainte-Beuve, and in general he loses, as it were, his standards when he treats of men living in his own times. Either he belittles the great or he praises up the small with a complacency which is only perhaps an indirect way of being offensive to the great. It is only fair perhaps to take into account this further injustice of posterity which, forced to eliminate, to make reservations, to sink names into oblivion, neglects the talents of former generations, and, considering only the eminent geniuses, makes them much bigger than they really are by placing them in isolation; but, even so, the fact still remains

that Sainte-Beuve did not give, in regard to the great men of his time, whole-hearted admiration very freely.

Further, he was not very friendly to literary schools which came upon the scene when he himself was in middle age. But it would certainly be too much to expect, or to wish, him to welcome them very heartily. For one thing, it is almost an impossibility. Whatever may be the flexibility of one's mind, after a certain age one does not renew one's tastes. New schools are practically beyond the grasp of an elderly critic. He can get a hold upon them only through the qualities which they have in common with former schools. This is almost always the case. It is thought to be his method, but it is his expedient. It is thought to be malice, but it is necessity. Now also in this he makes a mistake; for new schools resemble the old ones, but never exactly. To-day, in reaction against yesterday, always resembles the day before yesterday, but never reproduces it exactly. To-day resembles the day before yesterday in so far as yesterday was in reaction against the day before yesterday, but only in that. To-day has the same opposition as the day before yesterday, but the resemblance goes no farther and the identity is merely apparent. So the elderly critics, confronted by new schools, understand them only superficially, believe they recognize in them old enemies with new faces and their attacks against them are actually directed behind them. Their criticism of the younger generation, instead of being more real than ever, becomes retro-active criticism.

More often, as in the case of Saint-Beuve, it conceals itself, really out of loyalty and because it finds itself on ground which is too new for it and too unsafe. Sainte-Beuve did not carry his investigation very far in the direction of the realist novel and the Parnassian poetry. He meddles a little with Baudelaire, amused by his eccentricities, curious about a relatively new state of mind, but he did not take him at all seriously.

Moreover, at the end of his life Sainte-Beuve was no longer, properly speaking, a critic, or only exceptionally and by way of diversion. I said there was not evolution in his ideas, but there was in his tastes. Very fond of poetry in his youth, but already keen on history, it is towards history that he inclined

more and more as he grew old, a very natural movement for a mind which was fond of truth but did not believe in it. One is master neither of one's tastes nor of one's ideas, and a time comes when they do not agree. Sainte-Beuve loved truth passionately; so much for his tastes. And his leading idea, that at least which recurred most frequently, was that truth is not made for Man nor Man for truth. Hence it was impossible for him to turn towards philosophy as many active-minded men do as they mature. He had been a moralist so long, in all directions and in every sense, that this material, which is not unlimited, was, so to speak, exhausted for him. Criticism, properly speaking, had tired him, because of the necessity it imposes to travel over the same ground very often and to come back to the same ideas. He ended up by setting aside ideas as being always approximative and therefore always deceptive. He set his heart upon facts. Facts in the end always become the deep interest of minds of this sort. They contain for such minds all the truth that can be attained by Man. They are pure and clear after much investigation, certain after many verifications. They shine forth in a cold splendour which satisfies and holds such minds. With such as Sainte-Beuve, love of truth becomes love of exactitude; and really it is never otherwise with them, only it is rather late before they decide in what their love of truth consists.

Sainte-Beuve experienced this last passion deeply. Facts loved for themselves, without need of making them interesting by making them significant, without need of their proving, asserting, or foretelling something, without need of their depending on a general law, without need of attributing to them a meaning to give them value, without need of transforming them into ideas; facts considered as things of beauty when they are exact, and as imposing when they are numerous; here was certainly the last object of Sainte-Beuve's stern affections. The last form in which he was known to us was as a historian without any historical philosophy, but scrupulous, watchful, diligent, keen. It was the natural outcome of his turn of mind. As we grow old, we throw off all that belonged only half to ourselves, all those things which were only transitory tendencies, due

to age, circumstances or surroundings; we fall back upon our chief faculty; Sainte-Beuve's was certainly curiosity, curiosity for its own sake, without aim beyond its reach, without any desire but that of satisfying itself.

VIII

It was a great life, in spite of his weaknesses and miseries, and one of which the largest part was consecrated to an immense inquiry into humanity. If Man's salvation, and also the true way for him to comply with the exigencies of his nature, is to escape out of himself, Sainte-Beuve, who had perhaps more than anybody need of escape, did not fail to find his way and almost saved himself. His love of truth was his "detachment." He clung to it in spite of a number of bad dreams and a certain number of shabby actions. It could be said that love of truth became for him a means of elevation and purification.

It must be observed that he sacrificed something to his love. He could have earned much more money by his pen if he had not clung to the extreme slowness and immense "losses of time," resulting from scholarship, minute investigation, verification and control repeated twenty times. He made for himself a conscience out of this love of truth—that is to say, a sort of religion. We transform into a religion anything which detaches us from ourselves, and we desire that this action shall be made at a price, that we should make sacrifices for it. Criticism was Sainte-Beuve's religion, and it was fairly severe, taken all in all, fairly exacting and, consequently, fairly lofty. After all, it is something to have a religion, whatever it may be and however much mingled with human motives.

His influence was probably much more important than is commonly believed. There is nothing equal to the influence of imperceptible and continuous forces. Sainte-Beuve, as it were, distilled and insinuated, drop by drop, week by week, over a period of thirty years, a sort of cold positivism, mild scepticism and calm disillusionment. Gradually he turned into ice a century which he had found at boiling-point. He dismissed with a slow, very active and apparently careless hand all illusions, all hopes

and all faiths. It was a labour which was long, minute, cautious, and almost respectful, but stubborn, against old as well as new beliefs; against Christianity, progress, perfectibility, optimism, men's confidence in God, and their confidence in themselves. His natural and instinctive enemies were all believers in all beliefs, Catholics, orthodox Protestants, men of 1848. All regarded him as quite impervious to any faith, believing only in the science of facts and without even the hope of inferring a doctrine from this science.

I know very well that it was possible to consider him as a dogmatic positivist to a certain extent, and so to style him as a "man of the future." In 1867 he wrote to M. Albert Colignon: "In this crisis" (the shipwreck of ancient faiths) "there is only one thing to be done in order to avoid drooping or sinking into decay; to pass on quickly and step firmly towards an order of reasonable, probable, connected ideas, which shall give convictions instead of beliefs . . . and prepare in all new minds a basis for the future. There is being slowly created a morality and a justice on a new foundation, not less solid than in the past, indeed more solid, because none of the puerile fears of childhood will go to the making of it. Let us cease as soon as possible to be children. In the existing state of society the salvation and the virility of a nation are within itself and not elsewhere. The choice will lie between Byzantinism and true progress." But he scarcely ever gave expression to declarations of this sort except clandestinely, and rather in obliging letters. By nature he could not let himself believe in either the ancient or even the new philosophies. He refused to agree with those of the past and reserved his approval of those of the future.

Nobody perhaps among thinkers thought more without reaching conclusions. Thus he founded—the word is very unsuitable for a work which savours so little of construction, establishment, even the desire to establish—he helped to give birth to a school of scepticism, by which greater men than he, such as Renan, found themselves in the end comfortably and gently enveloped. The sceptical school of the middle of the nineteenth century, so particular, composed, unlike others, of

careless and light, yet painstaking, energetic and sad minds, was, as it were, brought up and nourished by Sainte-Beuve.

He also founded, and in this case the word is exact, a school of psychology. Nothing was more remote from the so-called Romantic period than the study of souls. The philosophic school, under the name of psychology, studied, not without conscience, not without talent, the "faculties" of the soul considered in a perfectly abstract fashion, and established a kind of psychical mechanics.

The novelists, with a strength of imagination which stood them in stead of information, created souls, most often taking their own as models, or sometimes modelled on their dreams, and consequently either exceptional or almost unreal souls. Balzac himself, more powerful than delicate, invented more than he observed, and the life which he breathed into his characters was rather the result of a spirited effort of his genius than a natural transposition of reality, than a passage from real life written easily into the book.

And of moralists, properly speaking, there were hardly any, or really none at all, during forty years. Sainte-Beuve, together with Stendhal—whom, by the way, he did not like for various reasons, some of which were good—was passionately fond of watching real souls live, either in the present or in history, and of explaining how they lived. He brought back to this study, which is the very foundation of all literary art and is particularly the very spirit of French literature, the generation which read him in 1850, and also that which practised it around 1870, and the renaissance of the psychological novel is largely due to the imperceptible and almost intimate hold which he took upon the intelligences of both writers and readers.

Let us add finally that, as is very often the case, he was not without contributing to the birth of what he least liked, systematic criticism. It is possible for a man endowed with such a nature as Sainte-Beuve's to pile up an enormous quantity of historical facts, literary notions and ethical observations without ever reducing them to a system. But that is not possible for humanity itself. Humanity will always want to infer a science from observations; to express the law which the

succession, repetitions or groupings of facts seems to reveal or invites it to suppose; to give by means of thought an order and organization to this material which is there, dispersed and scattered, beneath our eyes. To pile up so much material is therefore to provoke a constructor who has no desire to exist; it means that, although one repels every system, unwillingly a system must be found, and the more one refuses to set it up oneself, the greater is its opportunity to make itself and its reason for existing. It was impossible not to consider Sainte-Beuve's labours as the preparation for a work.

Here was an architect who did not desire that quarries so rich and so patiently dug should give to the world a monument. Taine was the disciple who was unfaithful to the master's thought in that he knew his work and regretted that he had not turned it to the best possible account. He considered Sainte-Beuve's books as "notebooks of remarks," and believed that the law which, so to speak, slept there remained to be drawn from these and some other notebooks of observations.

Thus sometimes one initiates an intellectual movement in which one did not believe, in which one does not want to take part and which one has condemned beforehand. And it does not matter. Sainte-Beuve was an agitator without ardour and without passion, but continued, patient and stubborn; and to him are due, at least so far as much of their quality is concerned, two or three intellectual upheavals, two or three of those whirlwinds which disturb the mental atmosphere and renew it.

TAINE

TAINE

I

On condition that it is not made binding, and that it need not be scrupulously followed in the course of this study, it is possible to apply to Hippolyte Taine the method which he invariably applied to those whom he studied, and to look first of all for the "leading quality" of the author of *The Origins of Contemporary France*; then to try to discover by what secondary qualities it is supported and upheld, as it were; and then what is the course of development followed, and the work gradually evolved out of it. This is all the more possible since Taine had a systematic mind and was what might be called a systematic being, and such men, who are rather rare, lend themselves quite naturally, quite legitimately and almost unavoidably, to treatment by the method in question. If he applied it to others it is because he felt it essentially applicable to himself. To "treat" him in this way is to understand him as he understood himself.

Taine's leading quality was probity. He had an upright soul. He had a horror, not only of any falsehood, but of charlatanism and anything approaching to charlatanism, such, for example, as inexactitude, and a certain ability to present it in an apparently honourable form; confusion, disorder, more or less poetic vagueness, dreaming, or, if not dreaming, complacency in giving expression to one's dreams, as though they could be considered as beliefs, or as though beliefs could be drawn from them. And oratory, too, is, or can easily become, included in this category of things.

All this repelled Taine. He had a passion for precision; he had a straightforward sort of mind.

His education had a tremendous influence upon him in the wrong way, in the sense contrary to that expected of it. In the fashion of his time he was taught some rhetoric, Latin discourses, Latin verse, and a philosophy—which was brilliant, but cared little for precision, and was more oratorical than scientific. The finest effect that an education can have is to inspire in the scholar a desire to do his education over again. This does not mean

to say that the most defective educations are the best. A good education must be provided for average minds, but the great minds will have complete success in it and will experience and discover the desire to surpass it.

This was the case with Hippolyte Taine. He was a very brilliant literary scholar and very quickly had a strong desire to acquire the qualities of a scientific mind. His probity aspired to reality. Like Descartes, he threw aside all he had learned to start his education over again in a manner consistent with his nature.

He was first drawn by an invincible attraction to the fact. The fact, difficult to distinguish, to disentangle, to verify, to define, is, when once extracted, clear, luminous and essential : it imposes itself upon our minds in a curiously authoritative way ; it impels us ; it defies us not to accept it. The mind finds a sort of austere pleasure in accepting it. Taine gave himself up passionately to this pleasure. He read with eagerness, picked out, piled up and collected facts with energetic patience. He was curious especially about little facts, details of customs, tiny features that are overlooked in rapid inquiries. It is to them that the probity of an inquisitive mind is naturally attracted. Such facts have not been handled by others, distorted, converted into ideas, stamped with the mark of a mind, false, perhaps, or uncertain. They are more themselves than any others. They come fresh from the ore, in a pure state. Moreover, a big fact is complex ; consequently it is, or seems to be, vague ; a big fact is a fact, but it has the appearance of a general idea. Instinctively Taine prefers facts that are not big. At any rate, the outcome of the first period of his intellectual life was a very considerable collection of facts made with a passion for exactitude.

It is very rarely that a person is content to accumulate facts, whatever may be his passion for them. In the first place it is practically an impossibility. Facts must be classified, if only to escape the dizziness and perplexity which are induced by the sight of a chaos, or merely of a tumultuous crowd. Any classification implies a general idea. If known facts are distributed in one way rather than another it is because judgment has been exercised over them. They have been considered as begetters of

each other and have been disposed according to this idea, or as opposed to each other, and have been distributed according to this view, or as more important than each other, and have been disposed according to this estimation. As soon as facts are classified there is a system, if only provisional, imposed upon them. Furthermore, the need for clarity is part of the need for intellectual probity. The same disposition which leads us to consider facts only to dispel intellectual fogs, leads us to classify them in order to see them together, yet still to see them clearly.

Only here there is a contradiction. Intellectual probity demands clarity, a clear mind leads to method, method is already system; but probity mistrusts system. Supposing a system should be false, which is quite a possibility, then henceforth it will have its influence, not only on the method of classifying facts, but on the way in which they are observed. Taine himself said that a general idea is a stake which gives support to a man, but stiffens him. A system is also a set of pigeon-holes in which facts are arranged as collected. When it is made, supposing it consists of a hundred holes, if a fact is found which would need a hundred-and-first hole, in order not to upset the whole arrangement this fact, whatever it may be, is placed in one of the hundred; and herein lies a mistake.

Furthermore a system becomes an instinct—an artificial instinct which a man makes for himself. Once he has acquired it he does not adjust facts systematically—that is to say, consciously and spontaneously—to his idea of a whole, but instinctively puts into his system those facts which fit into it, forces into it, by deforming them, those which do not fit in, and, ignoring them, casts aside those which are so strongly contradictory that they could never in any way be adjusted to it.

Taine's probity made precisely these objections to itself. First of all it was reassured by its consciousness of itself. It reminded itself that it was so fond of the fact, so accustomed to seeking it patiently, so scrupulous to observe it carefully, that it would escape the inconveniences into which the necessity for classification leads other people.

Then it probably reminded itself that Hippolyte Taine's mind had a quality which is rare among systematic minds: it was

modest, and modesty is a guarantee in such circumstances. The system which a systematic mind imposes upon facts is very often a general thought, drawn not from facts but from itself, not from without but from within itself, from inside suggestion, from a tendency of character, or even of temperamental disposition. Taine's conscience told him that he had nothing to fear in this respect. His modesty reassured him. He was sure that he would not yield to the need, which most of us experience, to impose an accident of our personality upon the universe, and to explain the world by what is scarcely more than an explanation of ourselves, or even merely an indication of what we are. He assured himself that "nature seen through a temperament" was the definition of an artist's talent, not of the system of a learned, patient, painstaking and scrupulous philosopher. Perhaps he was wrong. But his good will and his modesty were so certain and so obvious to him that it was quite natural that he should have reassured himself by trusting to them.

And if his system was perhaps narrow that, too, was an effect of probity and modesty. He disliked rashness in the making of assertions which are, or even run the risk of being, beyond the powers of the human mind. Exaggeration of the sphere of human intelligence was for him one of our most common fancies. To him it was more or less conscious charlatanism to pretend that we can understand the entire scheme of things, or that we can even catch a glimpse of its meaning.

It might be expected that he would become a sceptic. But scepticism was as inconsistent with his nature as was the fearless making of general assertions or demonstration of universal truths. For scepticism itself is somewhat lacking in honesty. First of all, it is always incomplete, and the man who professes it always believes in some little things; so he expresses these little beliefs in some way under cover of scepticism, by veiled insinuations, in the form of chance probabilities; and in this procedure there is something deceitful, which is not worthy of an upright mind.

Then scepticism is an extreme discretion, not only of the mind, which is good, but of character, which is not so good; it is rather too often used never to be responsible for its opinions nor embarrassed by its contradictions. Supposing something a man has

said is proved to be wrong, he can say, since he is a sceptic, that he is not surprised. If his opinion to-day does not fit in very well with those of former days, this is an excellent proof of the inconsistency of human judgments, which is precisely his principle, for he is a sceptic. His being a sceptic answers for everything. It is precisely because it is such a convenient word that its use is not the sign of very great courage. The only thing worthy of an upright mind is to study, to acquire through study some general ideas (which is inevitable, however one may try to avoid them), to consider them, after due examination, as the truth, and then to speak them out.

It is true these general ideas must be very carefully controlled to see if they are really products of our legitimate means of acquiring knowledge, which are not numerous and are very limited. We must fix very definite limits for ourselves and for our faculties of discernment; abandon honestly and boldly immense parts of so-called human knowledge, when once we have realized that they are only parts of the human imagination; but within these clearly defined and strictly observed limits we must assert and express our beliefs as beliefs. That, again, is intellectual probity.

In this way will be formed, not a general view of things, but a clear picture of visible things; thus the limited but real field of human knowledge will be defined, enclosed and traversed by clear and well-ordered paths.

Such knowledge will be of a discreet nature, such a philosophy will be modest, and one must know how to resign oneself to it; its lack of confidence, moreover, is not imposed on others, and others will be able to surpass it, but it will be the account of what one's own mind can embrace, understand and classify: "I do not know the limits of the human mind; I know those of my own mind."

II

And here in brief outline is the report which Taine made of the workings of his mind, the scheme, not of things, but of his ideas on the small number of things which he believed he could understand.

Man knows only through the senses. Locke and, especially, Condillac—because he is clearer and more positive than his master on this question—are right.

If Man believes sometimes that he has some other means of knowing than sensation, it is because he has considered as an idea sprung from the depths of himself an idea which has gradually divested itself of its original character in the depths of himself, has " abstracted " itself, been detached from its original root, dried up and refined in his brain. " I would refine a particle of matter." A particle of matter refined in us is what we call a pure idea.

But, as is so well shown by all the words we give to the most abstract ideas, all our ideas are primarily images. Our ideas are a reflection within ourselves of the external world.

To know if one of our ideas is true or false it must be referred back to the image which is its source, and henceforth nothing but what is contained in this original image must be seen in that idea. Anything that has been added to this image is the work of our own invention. It may be brilliant, fine, æsthetic, moving ; it is not real ; we feel it, but we do not " know " it. Knowledge is ideas which proceed directly from the images which things convey to us. Man adds nothing to what nature gives him through the medium of the senses, nor has he within himself an independent and autonomous faculty of knowing, which acts outside facts known by his senses. He has often believed that he had such a faculty, and this has given rise to an illusion. He has a power of analysis and synthesis, which he has considered as a faculty of knowledge, and a gift of imagination, which he has similarly taken for a power of understanding.

This capacity for analysis and synthesis is abstraction. Confronted by real objects, which nature puts before us, we are capable of taking a feature, characteristic or aspect of these objects and considering it independently. After having seen white sheep we are able to conceive *white* independently of sheep. It is an abstraction, and abstraction consists in ability to divide and subdivide notions which Nature gives to us in a complex form.

On the other hand, we can totalize the characteristics common

to different things and represent them by a comprehensive word, which is representative for us of all these common characteristics. We have seen inanimate objects and living beings. We have one single name for the thousand phenomena of nutrition, assimilation, co-ordination of parts, centralization, which we have observed in living beings: we call it Life. This is an abstraction. We have never seen life. This word is only representative of different phenomena which have been observed. It sums them all up briefly for us. It is the sign of a total. It is a synthetic abstraction, just as the operation by which the idea of whiteness was detached from that of sheep was an analytical abstraction.

But by neither operation do we add anything to facts known by the senses. We merely dispose of them in a manner convenient to us. In one case we isolate them in order to see them better, in another we assemble them to be able more easily to remember them; we add nothing to them. We know them better, but we do not know more about them. Our illusion begins when we believe we really know more about them because we have created another word. Nature never gave us whiteness in itself; because we have created this word, an abstract word, we believe we have realized some new thing. Nature never showed us life, but living beings; by creating this abstract word, life, we believe we have added something to our knowledge. We have taken a capacity for analysis and synthesis as a power of understanding.

Further still, we have a certain gift of imagination—it would be better to say, of artificial vivification—which causes us to consider abstract things not only as things, but as living beings. When we talk about life we think we have made an additional discovery in nature, but this is an illusion; and we have a tendency to think that life is a cause, an agent, a separate being; and this, again, is an illusion. First we *realize*, then we *vivify* words, which are only signs, symbols, final marks, *mementoes*, of the workings of our mind.

This is our way of creating, and it is true that we create thus—but only phantoms, which end either by encumbering us or by concealing nature from our eyes. We must learn to distinguish the point at which our entirely legitimate faculty—

actually our sole and only legitimate faculty—of abstraction becomes transformed into false faculties—that is to say, into a so-called faculty of comprehension which *adds* something to the facts known by the senses, and into a faculty of invention which gives artificial life to simple, convenient and useful words. We must refer back all that is in our minds, all that we know or believe we know, all that we dream, all that we believe or want to believe, to the original operation by which these things entered into us. We shall see always that this original operation is an abstraction, and that abstraction is the only faculty of the human mind.

Then, knowing clearly what is abstraction and that, if it affects facts known by the senses, it never adds anything to them, it can be said that everything that goes beyond facts known by the senses, and adds something to them, is useless, if not for poetry and sentiment, at least from the point of view of knowledge, understanding and truth.

Thus all metaphysics collapses, since, as the word itself indicates, the metaphysical is anything which exceeds nature and adds something to it. Metaphysics is supposition, though in a very reasonable form, so long as it is regarded only as supposition; it is not knowledge. We feel that, if all that we know comes to us through the senses, since our senses are so limited, there is evidently an immense world which escapes us; and the more we are persuaded that we know nothing beyond facts known to our senses the greater becomes this world which lies outside of their limited reach. Only we do not know this world, and there is a great advantage in not believing that it is possible to know it; for it is the mixture of real data and metaphysical suppositions, considered as legitimate as real data, which gives rise to incoherent ideas and inconsistent systems. In dealing with metaphysics, one must realize that one is dealing with supposition, and say so; when one is adhering strictly to facts known to the senses and to the operations of abstraction, considered as pure abstraction and preservin ability function, one must realize that one is dealing with knov us in a and that one is in the sphere of modest human understan

As for Taine, he firmly resolves not to move out common

sphere. He would like to review human understanding reduced strictly to knowledge, to find out what Man, when he makes no *supposition*, in the etymological sense of the word, knows of himself and of this part of the universe which is for him the universe.

This starting-point is certainly open to question. However reserved Taine may be, to whatever minimum he endeavours to reduce our means of knowing, the choice which he makes of abstraction as our only legitimate faculty can still be found to be arbitrary. Why should we trust in this faculty more than in another? What are its claims? It has perhaps in its favour the fact that it adds nothing to what is known through the senses; but it elaborates such knowledge and throws it out of shape. Is it legitimate? This faculty is made to cease operating at the moment when it believes it will add something to facts known to the senses. This transformed abstraction is no longer sure, commendable and something to be depended upon. Was it so originally? Are we allowed to trust to anything but the evidence, pure and simple, of our sensations?

And why should this particular evidence be considered as more credible than any other? How is its infallibility assured? Taine's scepticism with regard to our metaphysical faculty can be applied to any other form of our faculties. And, on the contrary, if we believe in the evidence of our senses and in abstraction elaborating what the senses give us, we wonder why we should not believe in some other of our inmost powers. Why, for example, not in the evidence of our conscience? When conscience tells us we are free beings, we will surely not believe it, because the idea of Liberty can obviously not come to us from the "not ourselves" through the medium of the senses. But why is this privilege granted to our senses and refused to the conscience?

This is the moment at which choice and preference play a part. Whence come these preferences? Always, in such a matter, preference must be made to Cartesian "evidence." We believe that seems clear to us; we prefer to believe what seems more clear to us. It was in Taine's nature to find external things clearer than inner things. He was an observer, a gleaner of

" small facts," a collector, a naturalist, in all the subjects with which he treated. Later on, when he became a critic, he explained an author by his surroundings, race, country, history, by all his environment, rather than by himself. Such a man will not probe the inner depths to listen for the voice of personal conscience. It will seem hollow and vague. He will find clearer the external world's affluxions into Man ; he will best see Man constituted by what he receives from his environment. Sensation will seem to him the surest and only legitimate means of gaining knowledge because it will be clearest for him.

On the other hand, he is a logician. He loves to reason in a straight line, out of a " geometric mind." Abstraction, the highest degree of geometric operation, pleases him exceedingly. When, in later years, he turns critic, after having explained an author by his environment, he would point to a single leading faculty and from it deduce all the author's qualities and faults. This is abstraction, reducing a man to a leading faculty. Even when he considers mankind in general, he desires to see in him only one single intellectual faculty, of which others are only a sort of perversion, and this faculty is that which is strongest, and more permanent than others, in Hippolyte Taine—namely, the abstractive faculty.

Whatever may be our opinion of it, this is Taine's starting-point ; that we will know Man and the world only through sensation, elaborated by abstraction. Seen in this single light, in what do mankind and the world consist?

The world, as " known " to us, and not as supposed by us, can be reduced to a certain quantity of matter governed by inflexible and never-changing laws. Everything in it is *determined.* Its life, what is called in current language the accidents of its existence, are the exact result of particular causes ; they are a series of causes and effects, mathematically precise ; they are a theorem in practice, a mechanical problem turned into a machine that moves.

Was there, outside or within the world, a mind which created and continues to create, an intelligent support for this mass, a mechanician for this machine? Possibly ; but we do not know, because we see nothing, and we cannot in any way know what

we do not see. We do see the machinery, which is exact, clear and well planned:

"Mainte roue y tient lieu de tout l'esprit du monde,
La première y meut la seconde,
Une troisième suit; elle sonne à la fin."

By means of abstraction it is, or would be, quite possible to derive the particular laws of this mechanism from more general laws, these general laws from even more general and less numerous laws, and these finally from one single law. Just as all the phenomena of light can be derived from the law of wave-lengths, and all the phenomena of gravity from the law of attraction, so all the laws which regulate matter could be derived from a single law, and "the ultimate object of science is precisely this supreme law." With the discovery of this law we shall have discovered "the unity of the universe." But, it must be observed, only its unity, not its essence, will thus be discovered. This single law will still be only a law—that is to say, a formula. It will be the formula of our ultimate understanding of what we know about the universe. Even then, to make of this law a real thing, a substance, a force, whatever you will, would be to make the mistake which we have criticized above: it would be to realize an abstraction. And to make of this law a being would be to make the other mistake to which attention has been drawn: it would be to vivify an abstraction, to return to the mythological period, as Comte said. Living man, with his five senses and his abstraction, will never know anything of the personality of the universe or of the personality outside of and dominating the universe. This is the limit of the knowable and the unknowable.

And, has this universe a visible aim? Does it progress toward some end? We know nothing about this either. Ultimate causes are illusions. They are not known to us either through the senses or by abstraction; therefore they do not exist. The senses give us only sequences of facts; abstraction gives us only causes, and causes in this case are only facts bigger than others, whose existence is found always to give rise to the others. There is no further meaning to the idea of cause, when we do not *invent*.

But who shall say that these big facts exist *in order that* the others shall arise? Is it suggested that there is a design, an intention, in all this? If so, whence does this suggestion arise? From the evidence of the senses? No. From abstraction? No; we have just observed what abstraction gives to us. Then this idea of an intention has no foundation. It comes to us because we, when we do something, do so with some intention. But there is no reason to suppose that the world behaves as we do; and it is not even proved that we act with an object in view. Undoubtedly this is a mistake. Our inner sense tells us that our actions have aim, but we should not trust our inner sense. The conviction that he is acting with some intention can very well be the illusion of a being who is conscious of himself as a cause but not as an effect. We believe perhaps that we go where we are pushed. We had the intention perhaps of doing what we were absolutely forced to do, and what we believe we want to do because we are doing it. In any case, even if it were true that we act according to intention, we have by no means the right to *see* the world behaving in the same way; for we only see it acting by causes and effects, exclusively. This world, then, as it appears to us, is strictly determined, and does not reveal any liberty, any personality nor, as current language will have it, any soul.

It must also be observed that it reveals no morality. Inanimate nature is amoral, animate nature is immoral. There is neither good nor bad in inanimate nature; in plant and animal nature, evil triumphs, or at least injustice, and there is eternal victory of the strongest over the weakest. If any example is set, it is not beautiful; if there is merely a spectacle, it is beautiful, but with a sinister beauty.

This is the explanation of religions, the most varied and opposite moreover, those which are based on fear and those which proceed from love. Those based on fear are only too natural. Behind the implacable laws which regulate the universe they visualize divinities which are wicked, annoyed at least, and very hard on creatures. Those which are based on love arise from a reflection—a reversion of the preceding idea. They suppose that, since it is not possible that a creator should be

malevolent, this world in which evil holds so large a place must be an immense test which has to be courageously endured by creatures in order to fit them for another world. At the bottom of these two very different conceptions is there not the same idea, the same sensation and the same grief—namely, the anxiety which the spectacle of nature causes to Man, the pain which the evil spread over the earth causes eternally to the conscience of humanity?

But the philosopher who forbids himself all metaphysics does not enter into this consideration. When he supposes that the single law which will account for all the laws of the universe is discovered, when he sees it in conjecture, when " its serene and sublime aspect is revealed " to him, the mind of man " bows down in dismay and admiration and horror " (in the Latin sense of respectful fear, the thrill of the small in the presence of the great), and " at the same moment this mind rises again, it forgets its mortality and its smallness; it enjoys by sympathy this Infinity of which it thinks, and participates in its greatness."

Admiration and humility, and also quite intellectual sympathy for what has aroused our admiration, these are the rather cold sentiments which the ultimately realized universe can inspire in the thinker. They are sentiments between anger and love—above, at some distance from, and certainly outside of, them. One must not be annoyed by the world; but there is no hope that one will ever love it.

III

Up to this point, Taine's ideas are hardly new. They are those of the positivism already constituted by Auguste Comte when Taine arrived upon the scene of intellectual life. His ideas on Man are newer and more personal. They are very clearly pessimistic. Comte was content to say that Man is a " continuation of nature," a being made like the other " guests of the universe, called animals," only a little more complex. Taine made a more minute inquiry than Comte into humanity, and from this inquiry Man emerges practically abominable.

Many varied things go to make up this misanthropy of Taine's. First of all, a certain timidity he always had and which does not prepossess in favour of men. Taine was inclined to be suspicious and sad. He was a charming friend when once he could give himself up to confidences, but he was not of those who find it easy to do this. It is well known that La Rochefoucauld had a similar character. Such men harbour always with regard to humanity a certain secret malice. They unconsciously bear it a grudge for the small amount of intimacy that can exist between it and them. They reserve their sympathy for a little group of loved or admired ones, and for the rest of the human flock, with which they have had only—have been able to have only—very few dealings, they experience but a certain disdain, or at least a certain coldness. It is necessary to find men lovable to love them; but, even more, it is necessary to love men to find them lovable. Therefore those who love them ultimately are those who began by doing so; they are expansive people, who " enter into " others and accost them, not very meditative nor very discreet, who have been first and foremost at the service of their fellows and have made them sympathetic by sympathizing with them provisionally. Taine was not at all of these, and this is the first cause of his pessimism.

Add to this that, as Stendhal says, " difference engenders hate," and that Taine was essentially different from the majority of men in that " he liked to reason," like the philosopher Peter and the philosopher Paul whom he so cleverly brought into the limelight in *Classical Philosophers of the Nineteenth Century*. Now the majority of men do not reason, or reason badly, and do not care very much for it. In this they surprised Taine and displeased him. He felt himself out of his element among them. He saw them dominated by their passions; some, the wisest of them, by their interests; and things which seem natural to ordinary people, and to which they resign themselves fairly easily, seemed to him almost monstrous. He was born for the limited society and discreet company of guarded, patient, polite, methodical and rather cold thinkers. When he came away from these, and cast his eye around among men, he saw nothing very satisfactory nor, consequently, very sympathetic.

His earliest literary admirations are at the same time a proof and a confirmation of this mental attitude. From youth he was, as it were, smitten with Balzac and Stendhal, very bitter minds, more disposed to exaggerate men's failings than to mitigate them, who drew up in the form of novels a fairly harsh denunciation of humanity. Later, as was natural, the grey pessimism of Maupassant was entirely to his taste.

The influence of Balzac and Stendhal is very marked in the only volume of direct observation made by Taine, *Thomas Graindorge*. This book of youth is far from being youthful, and it is a singularly morose entertainment. The author is seen to be astounded and stupefied, irritated and exasperated, by the covetousness and brutality of men, and by the coquetry and frivolity of women, and he repeats his assertions on these matters with a gloomy insistence and a provoking obstinacy, which reveal, if I may say so, a spirit wounded to the quick; and, finally, he takes refuge, full of weariness and disgust, in artistic and contemplative life: "Play me some Beethoven." It is rather like Leconte de Lisle's "Tu te tairas, ô voix sinistre des vivants," or it is the timid and disillusioned retreat of the monk who turns aside from the world and desires only to hear the solemn and soothing voice of big organs.

I know that the *Notes on England* are less gloomy. I will not say that they are less sincere, but that they are more systematic. The *Notes on England* are secretly inspired by an aristocratic thought. The author wanted to prove that the existence of an upper class, the political and particularly the moral influence of this class on a nation, and the acceptance, more or less formal yet real, by the nation of this state of things, provide still the best conditions of stability and strength for a nation. This led him to consider with a certain complacency the character and customs both of this upper class and relatively of the nation as a whole.

But his general idea of humanity was not perceptibly modified in this way. It is very unfavourable. Taine sees always in Man "the ferocious and dismal gorilla," to whom it is supposed that our original ancestors must have borne a resemblance; "the carnivorous beast" who "has canine teeth like the dog

and the fox, and who has, since his origin, dug them into the flesh of others." Thus he was, thus he is still, and he "cuts throats," as in prehistoric times, "for a bit of raw fish." There are only very slight differences in method. If you scrape off a little of the thin coating of varnish which social invention, civilization and religions have succeeded, after so much effort, in putting on any man you see, here is what you find.

First of all, a covetous and avaricious animal, who, "thrown destitute on an ungrateful world where maintenance is difficult," has always "the fixed idea of acquiring, amassing and possessing," rapaciousness, strife for gain and preservation. This is his smallest defect, for it is one that can be disciplined. It can, with time, under the influence of reason and of habit, resulting from accumulated and inherited reasonings, become well-intentioned interest, an important social factor, an element of stability and conservation, a sort of morality or apparent morality. But it should be observed that this transformation, very difficult as it was, remains unstable, almost accidental, very fragile, and that, at the least shock, at the least social upheaval, it is wiped out. What remains is what was beneath, the primitive instinct, rapaciousness, readiness to snatch at and claw the prey.

In Man you find, too, a madman. "Properly speaking, Man is mad, just as his body is naturally ill. The health of your mind, like the health of your organs, is only a beautiful accident." Reason is a faculty in itself rather weakly, hesitating, groping, which makes up general ideas out of a thousand fine threads, easily entangled, which are called observations or detailed ideas. These general ideas, elaborated with great difficulty, which we are never sure of holding firmly or seeing fully, which are disputed, which contend and struggle among each other, are our weapons against those terrible forces, direct in their movement, extensive and violent in their onslaught, which are called passions. They are very feeble weapons, an almost vain resource, which leave Man practically at the mercy of his instincts, of his "impulses" and his imaginations.

For, here is a third characteristic: this being, so little capable of reasoning, has infinite capacity for inventions, hallucinations

and myths. "His mental constitution, more fixed" than that of animals or of primitive men, sharpened just by the need of having ideas, since thought is the only means of Man's superiority, and consequently his condition of existence, "has made him an imaginative being, whose swarming thoughts develop of their own accord into monstrous myths, and thus increase beyond all measure his fears, his hopes and his desires. Hence arise in him an excess of sensibility, sudden outbursts of emotion and of contagious ecstasy, currents of irresistible passion, epidemics of credulity and suspicion."

Such is Man in his general characteristics; though he does not seem to be like this, because, yoked, bound and repressed, he moves round fairly regularly and at regular periods in social intercourse, impelled by the necessity of gaining his livelihood. But he is such at bottom, and is so revealed as soon as an upheaval of the social organization leaves him free to go back to his true nature.

Taine not only has little liking for this Man, but is frightened of him. There is something slightly unhealthy in this fear which Taine experiences when he considers humanity. He, too, in some ways was imaginative, and knew these "amplifications," these exaggerations of inner thought, these "sad and heavy dreams," as Heine says, which tremendously increase our natural misery. He did not know thoughtlessness and its light and divine benefits. Continual meditation turned within him very easily into sadness, and his meditation was most often directed towards what was bad, defective and dangerous in human nature. He jeered most harshly at the optimistic dream of the eighteenth-century philosophers and of the Revolution in its initial stages. It seemed to him the most absurd and the most disastrous folly that ever intoxicated human brain. It seemed to him prodigious ignorance of human nature.

We do not need to point out once more that difference in dates partly explains difference in points of view, and that after the Revolution, the Empire, three invasions and the civil war of 1871 no philosopher in France could be as peacefully optimistic as an eighteenth-century philosopher. But, also, personal temperament is a leading element in such matters, of

which the proof is that, in this same eighteenth century, and in the midst of wealth and surrounded by pomp, Voltaire wrote *Candide*. Taine had, like Voltaire, a dread of human folly, and all his life his writings bore a certain resemblance to *Candide*, from *Graindorge* to *The Origins of Contemporary France*.

IV

When once the study of Man has taken hold of a person it cannot be got rid of. He comes back to it always, and even when he seems busy with something else it is still of this question that he is thinking, and on which he bases the particular work with which he is occupied, or seems to be occupied. When Taine, in wonderfully bold, colourful words, described the Pyrenees, he stopped to listen to the idle talk of his neighbours in inns, or to consider the appearance and nascent—already disturbing—coquetry of the little girls skipping on the pathways in the park. Taine did much criticism. He did not for a moment think of studying books; he considered the study of books only as a means of knowing the temperament of peoples. All his books of criticism are history-books, the books of a moral historian.

It is true that, previous to Taine, there was already much history mingled with criticism. But there was a difference. Before Taine, history in criticism was a framework whose function was to set off the picture. The object was to give better knowledge and a better picture of a literary personage by showing him in the time in which he lived and surrounded by his contemporaries. In order to portray Madame de Sévigné, for example, an outline of her time was sketched around and behind her.

Taine, as it were, reversed this picture. He will make the portrait of Mme de Sévigné in order to depict the seventeenth century. Literary personages will be for him first of all only *specimens*, then significant *products* of a certain epoch, and he will study them only in these two respects. The study of Man through history, history through literary history, literary history through the study of great writers, such might be the epigraph

of all his books, and in this formula are contained all the originality and all the defects of Taine's criticism.

He set out with the idea, which was a sort of axiom in his day, that literature is the expression of social life. Consequently the best way to find out about any period of social life is to study its literature. In considering a great writer, we must persuade ourselves that he did not make himself; he is a product of a thousand different causes. If we restrict ourselves to the chief of these causes we find that he is the product, firstly, of his race, then of the world in which he lived, finally, of the circumstances which left their impress upon him at the time of his talent's formation. He is a product, and representative, of all these.

Therefore *race*, *environment*, *time*—these are the three things which must be considered before considering the man himself. He will be understood only if these things are well known, and, conversely, to understand these things he must be known. The two studies will complete each other and be rendered more precise by each other. When his race, environment and time have been well explored, and well understood, we shall gain insight into a person himself and then—— But this brings us to the second part of the method, and it will be clearer for us to examine the first before coming to the second.

The first part of this method is very ingenious, and is scientific in appearance, in manner and in procedure. It is an application of Comte's method, which consists in proceeding from the more general and simple to the more particular and complex. Just as one must proceed from astronomy to geology, from geology to the physical and natural sciences, and from these to the study of Man, who is the most complex of created beings, so one must proceed from the study of ordinary men to the study of the man of genius, considered as something rarer, more complex and richer.

It must be observed that this method is productive of much beauty. In regard to any great writer it offers great scope, and permits of descriptions of his race, his native province, the town in which his infancy was passed, the population of this town, and so on; and thus provides the author with an opportunity

to make very fine, very brilliant, very extensive and very varied pictures. It is a method essentially *interesting*. Merely for this reason it would be liked, and one would wish that it were the method of any critic with the power to be a great historical painter; which in fact it is, for, whenever a critic is also a great historical painter, he will instinctively choose, if not this method, at least this procedure.

This method has therefore a great deal in its favour, and can attract the reader even as it attracted Taine himself: but it has only a very slight foundation in reason and truth, and almost at every step it lends itself to grave objections.

In the first place, the axiom on which it is based is very controvertible: "Literature is the expression of social life." It is necessary to know which literature is in question: for literature is not a homogenous mass, and at any given period there are three or four literatures side by side. We must admit that the literature of memoirs, of intimate correspondence, of little diaries and gazettes (those which were popular and very widespread, not those of a coterie or a section of a town), this lower literature, represents more or less the state of mind of a nation at a given period; but it is obviously less true—indeed, almost false, and scarcely at all proved—that the higher literature is representative of the popular or middle-class state of mind, of the average mind, at a particular date in the history of France or England. For, in the latter case, innumerable distinctions and reservations must be made. Dramatic literature might be put aside with the remark that, however noble it be, since it is addressed directly to the audience, it must *represent* life if it wants to please. Again, attention must be directed to the success which plays have had, and one must not presume to believe that *Le Misanthrope* is significant of the spirit of its times. And, apart from dramatic literature, the higher literature, lyric, epic, didactic, historical, philosophical, is the expression of the author's thought more, much more, than of the state of mind of the masses. It must not be forgotten that the world of great literature and of great art is a select world, and that, although there are undoubtedly connecting links between any select society and any crowd, yet the thought of a select society is not

representative of the thought of the crowd. This is manifest, to the surprise of the select, whenever the mass is led to voice its opinions.

The consideration of the literature of a time as the expression of the thought of that time is even, perhaps, the *way to make mistakes in dates*—so far, at any rate, as higher literature is concerned. Great writers are promoters; they think new things: they think what the crowd will think a century later. We now share Voltaire's opinion of tolerance; but at the time when Voltaire defended the Chevalier de la Barre the entire population of Abbéville demanded and required La Barre's death. So it is not the state of mind of the eighteenth century that must be sought in Voltaire, but our own. What is true of Voltaire is even more so of Rousseau. Great writers are contemporaries of the future.

Thus literature is the expression of social life on condition that it is first deprived of all its greatness, of all the big literary monuments. It can be done when one looks only for the history in literature. But, and this is the point, Taine wanted to study the great writers, and, in fact, studied these only. So there was a sort of conflict between his method and his object. His object was precisely the one incompatible with his method. His method ought to have led him to study anything but what he took as the object of his study.

He refused to see the difference between criticism and history. The literary value of a monument is almost in inverse proportion to its historical value, and vice versa. History is connected with things of a general character: a great literary work is, above all, a document of individuality. Thus criticism and history can be considered side by side, but they cannot be united. The very title of *Critical and Historical Essays*, which is very significant, contains an error.

As for the investigation of race, environment and time, just as it is interesting, so is it vain, because it is, as it were, external, and always remains external, to the real object of criticism. Certainly Corneille is a product of the French race, of Norman soil, of the Rouen middle classes and of the circumstances which surrounded him from 1604 to 1624. Only, these various

things explain everything about Corneille except his superiority, and the business of criticism is to account for superiority. These things describe a Rouen bourgeois of 1625, but not the difference between an ordinary Rouen bourgeois and Pierre Corneille; and, since this difference is the important thing, it follows that such considerations better describe Corneille's neighbour than Corneille himself. Hence, of what use are they?

Further, considerations of this sort not only fail to explain superior men, but can eventually give a wrong impression of them. These studies help the critic to represent to himself more or less exactly *any man* of a certain race, a certain place and a certain date; when they are applied to, brought to bear upon, a superior man they bring to light, throw into relief, beneath the critic's eyes, those parts of this great man through which he resembles any other man of his race, place and time—that is to say, his common and popular parts; and these are the parts which the critic will be, as it were, led and invited to depict. A humble citizen, lively, witty, jesting, rather talkative, telling dirty and satirical stories aimed against all authorities, not very devout, of a very unsound morality—here, perhaps, is a portrait of a middle-class inhabitant of Champagne about 1650. Well, for Taine, it is La Fontaine. Undoubtedly La Fontaine had all these traits in his character; but, further, he was a great poet, and it is the great poet who must be described to us. Taine does this: but all the rest, which is secondary, encroaches in the portrait upon the poetic genius, which is the essential, and hardly lets us catch a glimpse of it.

Actually, this idle and dangerous way of painting distinguished men is not even right for the painting of individualities *of any sort*. Properly speaking, it is " race psychology " applied to the psychology of individuals. Here, again, there is a confusion. The psychology of peoples is legitimate. There are certain very general characteristics which are common to nearly all the individuals among a people. There is nothing more reasonable, perhaps more useful, than the distinguishing and discovering of these traits, and inferring from them of conclusions as to the development and future of a nation. But there is

no sense in depicting any man whatsoever by the general characteristics of his race. His personality—and, however slightly original, he has a personality—consists of the two or three particular tendencies which distinguish him on the common background. Every southern Frenchman is an orator. Yes, but it is precisely for this reason that, if you are content to paint Mr X by saying that he is an orator, you will not at all have made his portrait. Since he is an orator it is necessary, first of all, to say what sort, and then to explain what are his other faculties besides that of being able to talk. It is evident that individuals are composed of peculiarities, or at least it is by means of these that we recognize individuals, distinguish them from the mass and keep them in our memory as individuals. Race psychology applied to individual psychology has the effect of identifying individuals with the common crowd —that is to say, its effect is not to depict but to blot out individuals.

And, lastly, this method is vain because it claims to attack and reduce the infinite complexity of nature, and cannot possibly succeed. Any man is certainly the product of his race, environment and time generally—that is to say, vaguely speaking; but race, environment and time even are very general terms, which embrace hundreds of thousands of different influences, hundreds of thousands of generative elements; and of these elements only a small number, in comparison with the great mass, has contributed to the formation of this man. The rest is unimportant, or practically so, and relatively to him. Therefore, to explain this man by his causes, it is necessary to recognize, among the thousands of possible causes, the twenty or thirty which, in his case, are the essential ones. These are the causes which bring it about that, at birth, before birth, he was already as he is now, while side by side with him, *apparently* formed under the same influences, his neighbours were and are extremely different from him. Thus it is that there are among fellow-citizens, among relations, among brothers, such marked differences, and also that there are born among Gascons men who are taken all their lives for Flemings. Now, nobody can know in detail all these thousands of possible causes, and nobody

can distinguish from the mass of possible causes the twenty or thirty which have gone to the making of an individual.

This is why there is no way of explaining—at any rate plausibly—an individual by his causes. This is why I said that race psychology applied to individual psychology explains everything except what needs explaining—namely, individuality—and why I said that the method of race-environment-time remains always outside of its object.

Again, this is why Taine's critical studies seem so often "prefaces" or "introductions," which do not lead to the subject to which they claim to lead. This method of procedure is all right as an introduction to the literary history of a whole nation, and also in the *History of English Literature* it is less inappropriate than elsewhere; but when an attempt is made to explain a single author these general, disproportionate considerations, seemingly almost external, are surprising. They give the impression that they would be quite as appropriate in a study devoted to another author as in one devoted to the author in question; one feels that Taine's general ideas on the French character could serve just as well to introduce a study on Diderot as one on La Fontaine, or at least a study on Racine as on La Fontaine, since, for these last two, race, environment and, very nearly, time coincide.

But for us the most important thing at the moment is not to prove or affirm, with reasons, that the method in question is dangerous, unproductive and deceptive: it is important to indicate how far, in making use of it, Taine is loyal to himself, and how his method in criticism is an application of his philosophical system.

We have seen that for Taine everything is "determined" in the world, and there is no room in the universe for accident and unforeseen events. What is true of the world must be true of Man himself. The world is a moving theorem; Man must be a "walking theorem." *To prove this hypothesis* let us take precisely an exceptional, unexpected, accidental man, one who seems less than any other preordained, who seems more than any other to interrupt the rigorous series of causes and effects, or to avoid it, and let us show that *even he* is a natural and necessary product

of a series and convergence of facts, that he is only the result of these and that anything which is in him was in them. Taine had a law of the world; he clung to it; he believed it to be exact; he believed it to be universal; he even challenged the exception that did not seem to fit into this law and tried to make it fit in. His critical method was at the service of his philosophic system and was invented only to serve it. But the trouble is that one is too conscious of the fact that it was invented for this reason, and that the philosophic system preceded the critical method.

Inversely, it seems almost certain that it is not the study of great authors that would have led Taine to a system of determinist philosophy; it is even difficult to believe that these two sets of ideas could have sprung up simultaneously, and fitted in with each other from the first, in the philosopher's mind. It is possible, but not probable. It seems almost certain that the philosophic system showed the way to the critic and even laid down his conclusions for him.

The philosopher said to the critic: "Remember, Livy *must* be 'determined' like the rotation of a planet, and La Fontaine like the vegetation of a fern; more complex but determined like them. It must be so." Hence all Taine's literary studies are like problems whose solution is given in advance, like those books in which it is not the conclusion which results from the investigations, but the investigations which arose out of the conclusion, or like those works in which it is not the question which has given rise to the answer, but the answer which has given birth to the question. The strained effect of these works arises from this. They do not seem to be autonomous and self-regulating, but dependent on something outside of themselves; they do not seem to be free; they also are "determined."

I remarked that this race-environment-time system was only part of Taine's method of criticism. He completed it by his consideration of the leading faculty. This consists in believing that every man, and especially every superior man, is dominated by a faculty so strong that all others are subordinated to it, put out of shape by it, so that in the end it becomes the active centre of this man, moulding him, fashioning him, and also directing him and pushing him entirely in a certain direction.

This idea is also interesting as a revelation of Taine's ideas, both as a moralist and as a critic. In this case he is more loyal to his essential mental tendencies than to his system, properly speaking. In the matter of mental tendencies he is pre-eminently a simplifier. Man has only one means of knowing: sensation. The brain can operate in only one way: abstraction. We have seen the effects of Taine's simplifying tendency. He still obeys this tendency by wanting to see in each man, as it were, only one faculty, only one at least which counts, gathering into a unity the complex whirlwind of a human soul.

He is less loyal, perhaps, to his system. The system did not demand of him the doctrine of the leading faculty. All is determined; everything obeys rigorous and fatal laws. Between animate matter and inanimate matter, vegetation, the animal world, humanity, there are only the differences between simpler organizations and more complex organisms. According to this system it is not necessary that Man, the most complex organism of all, should have in him a central force which subordinates all others to itself. Man can be considered as vacillating, varied, flexible, the theatre of a struggle of forces, where now one, now the other, gains supremacy, precisely because he is more complex than any other created thing.

If Taine preferred to see in Man an organism, undoubtedly very complex, but in which one or another faculty, according to the individual, preponderates over the others, and sways him, it is perhaps because he likes, as do all the positivists, to bring Man nearer to the rest of nature, to diminish the distance between Man and the other terrestrial beings, which mystics, in his opinion, exaggerate.

Each animal species has its special instinct, its particular and unique genius—for daring in one case, for cunning in another, for prudence in a third; humanity, more complex, has several such instincts, but in each individual there is only one, one at least that is powerful and dominating and which outweighs and enslaves all others. This is one of the many points of contact between humanity and the animal world.

There is another possible reason for our author's doctrine. The normal man is an idiot, less an idiot than those who are

officially described as lunatics, but his superiority to them is only a difference of degree. The clearest characteristic of a lunatic is a fixed idea. Normal man has no fixed idea, but he has undoubtedly the predominance of one instinct over all others, which at least encourages the fixed idea, and would lead to it if sufficient time were given for its attainment. The normal man is a so-called rational being who does not live long enough to become insane. And the same thing is even more true of the superior man, who is especially a man of a more intense cerebral activity. Such a man is naturally endowed with a faculty which profits more than others from the superabundance of cerebral activity. Popular opinion on the close connexion between genius and madness is false; but it is true in so far as that the brain of the superior man is, as it were, tending in a single direction, just as the lunatic's brain is concentrated on a single thought.

Finally, and more than anything, it was taste for abstraction which led Taine to the theory of a leading faculty. His conception of Man was the same as that for which the classical French writers have been so much reproached by various critics, including Taine himself. He saw in Man a passion invested with a body and served by organs. He depicted Man (often), not in his complexity, but as if he were only an abstraction called for a moment into life. A man was for him ambitious and exclusively ambitious, jealous and only jealous, a grumbler and nothing more, glorious and merely glorious, and so on. It should be observed that Honoré de Balzac held the same view, and this earliest admiration of Taine's must have helped to incline him to this theory.

He did as the classic authors and as his beloved Balzac. Only, as a philosopher, he generalized. He not only constituted his characters from a single passion; sometimes it was a passion and sometimes a faculty. Or rather he considered that ordinary men are composed of a dominating passion which groups and gathers around it all the forces of their being; but that men who lead especially an intellectual life are composed, not of a passion, but of a faculty, a gift, a dominant mental power which groups and gathers around it all their intellectual energies.

The leading faculty is the monomania of the intelligent man.

Whatever may be the road by which Taine arrived at this idea, it belongs to that class of ideas which can neither be refuted nor completely accepted. Unprejudiced observation and unsystematic experience find it sometimes almost correct, sometimes very nearly false. Just as there are men in whom one passion is so far dominant as to seem to absorb them entirely, and to enable them to be called by this passion (which incidentally justifies our classic writers, and Balzac among them); so there are writers in whom also one faculty, like imagination for example, takes such hold that all their writings are derived from, or can be traced to, this faculty, easily and quite obviously, as to their single origin.

But also, as there are men in whom several passions either struggle or are counterbalanced, or follow each other at fairly short intervals of time and make a sort of alternation, there are likewise writers who have several brilliant faculties and who have not a leading quality. It is fairly easy to see what is the leading faculty of a Chateaubriand or a Hugo, less easy that of a Lamartine or a Musset, much less easy that of a Racine, a La Fontaine, a Bossuet, or even a Voltaire. The reader is conscious of this through the state of mind which is induced in him when he studies the great authors and tries to explain them. Of one he says: "This one will not be difficult"; of another: "This one is harder"; which signifies always that the first has a very obvious and unquestionable leading quality and that the second has not, in which case he must be supposed to have one, and willingly or unwillingly must be entirely adjusted to it—a difficult task; or his various gifts must be studied and it must be shown how they co-operate and how they hinder or unite each other—a more difficult task.

Does this mean to say that in criticism there is no single method, and consequently that there is no single way of studying humanity itself? We are very inclined to think so. In this case, will there not only be no "scientific criticism" but also no true "moral sciences"? It is extremely likely, or at least the word "science" must be given another less precise

and less rigorous sense when applied to everything concerning intellectual and moral Man. The moral sciences cannot have the rigour of mathematical sciences or even of natural sciences, and, if they cannot compose a fixed method, the reason is that they cannot be rigorous, for their object is mobile, fluctuating and fleeting. Everything brings us back to this sort of antagonism or opposition between Man and the rest of nature, an opposition which systematic people, simplifiers and "monists," as they are sometimes called, force themselves to trace to a difference of degree, but which does not seem very capable of being reduced simply to a difference of degree.

This only goes the better to show why Taine, even here, was carried away, if not by his system, at least by all his mental tendencies, to an invariable, inflexible and, it would seem, inexorable kind of criticism. He was dominated always by the scientific mind, and by the desire to transform the object of his study into a scientific affair. To multiply points of view in the study of mankind would have been, for him, to behave like an artist or even almost an amateur; and to forget that the laws of nature are simple and that the scientific mind has as one of its objects their further simplification by drawing them nearer and nearer to a unity.

It is true that nature's laws are simple, but Man's are much less so, and in this case scientific simplification risks turning into mutilation.

The theory of the leading faculty allowed Taine to see more clearly into some groups of artists but to see others in an incomplete fashion. It is unnecessary to add that when great minds are systematic, their being systematic does not prevent them from being great, and hence it results that they remain powerful even when they put aside their system, and never seem to be more powerful than when they do put it aside, because then they remain powerful but are also freer. Taine was an artist whom the scholar in him tried to discipline. But luckily the scholar was not completely successful. When the scholar had marked out the framework of the matter in question, imperiously indicated the starting-point, laid down the stages of advance and implacably fixed the terminus, the artist

slipped in in the intervals and through the cracks in the system. Between two marks firmly planted by the surveyor, the artist was allowed a contemplation, for he was not so far obedient as to deny himself feeling, and then some pages would be made such as might have been written by a Gautier, more sensitive to different kinds of beauty, or a Sainte-Beuve, richer in language, more powerful in style and more vigorous in colouring. The study on La Fontaine, the articles on Balzac and Racine, the passages on Voltaire and Rousseau, in *The Old Régime*, are full of such pages. They can be detached from the system; they are beautiful and true without it, perhaps in spite of it; they do not prove either its truth or its falsehood, because they are not derived from it; they only illustrate it in every sense of the word, being brilliant illustrations which have recommended it to fame. It is not the system which has given them being. Taine, as a purely sensitive and "impressionist" critic, as an artistic critic, had something of the "violent vision" of which he spoke in an allusion to Hugo. He saw an author, or the world created by an author, in incredible relief, and he knew how to put this vision on to paper as on to a canvas. Designs, expressive, full of colour, bold, vigorous—and always too vigorous—abounded beneath his pen, and the reader was left with an ineffaceable impression.

This was certainly a style of decadence. Undoubtedly, Taine, with his sense of the enormous accumulation of different ideas with which modern brains are overcrowded, was rather too inclined to think that it was necessary to strike very hard upon these tired and dull minds if a fairly durable impression were to be left upon them. However, it must be remembered first of all that he was not altogether wrong, and that his idea of the mental state of his readers has really some truth in it. Again it must be remembered that, whatever his desire, it is always of himself that the most impersonal and even the most systematic critic makes a portrait; he always paints himself, modified by something which he has just read, such as himself after a visit to Balzac, to Corneille or to Voltaire.

The portraits which Taine made in turn of himself were true, sincere and exact. This scholar who wanted to be cold was

violently, strongly and deeply emotional. This was sufficiently demonstrated when he handled history. He showed, or betrayed without wanting to do so, as much nervousness as a Michelet or a Carlyle. As a critic he had already something of this quality. Exaggeration, the enlargement of contours, extreme prominence of forms and accentuation of colours, are therefore signs especially of his own mental condition.

In this respect they are valuable. There are some critics who manage to tell their readers what the latter already think, to express with precision what their readers have in mind in a state of confused thought. They do not perform a bad function. They act as professors, as judicious and very useful pedagogues. They take their student by the hand, as it were, and lead him from the stage where he is to the stage immediately above. There are other critics who vigorously express their own thoughts without a hidden desire to shock their reader, but with no effort to put themselves either at his level or in his capacity or his place. They give us not the impression which Racine *ought to make* on an ordinary scholar, but the impression *which he makes* upon themselves. This again is very useful, perhaps more so than the other. It changes aspects, multiplies points of view, excites thought and sharpens the critical sense.

Therefore it is very lucky that, outside of his system, Taine, escaping from it for a moment, gives us a glimpse of the state of mind, and even of sensibility, which certain of his readings induced in him.

Of the system nothing remains, or at least nothing more than what was there already before Taine had set it out and planned it entirely; there remains only the preoccupation not to detach the author under consideration from the historical and domestic events through which he passed, *if it is clearly evident that they had a great influence upon him.*

Of the critic's work there remain some pages, admirable in themselves and as works of art, significant especially of the particular sensations produced in a very learned, very nervous, very sensitive Frenchman of the middle of the nineteenth century by the great writers, and particularly by the great English poets and the great poets of the French seventeenth century.

V

We have studied Taine as a philosopher and a critic; it remains for us to study him as an historian before we conclude.

The inquiry into Mankind which Taine made, not in books but in history, is also very interesting. In truth, he did not do enough general history, and applied himself too late to historical studies, to have become a real historian, to have acquired all the virtues and the qualities of the historian. But the effort was great, the labour enormous, the conscience, if not the impassibility, unquestionable, and the monument thus raised lasting.

Taine, when he began his *Origins of Contemporary France*, set himself one object, and had two. He set himself to inquire into present times, the present constitution of France, by tracing back to the nearest origins of this present condition, by studying the last years of what is called the old régime, the Revolution and the beginning of the nineteenth century; and on the other hand, without being fully conscious of it, he had a secret aim to study once more the human being by considering him in one of these crises, in one of these pathological conditions, at one of these moments, in which the basis of his nature, rudely awakened by a violent eruption, is displayed and opened out in broad daylight.

Hence he had two points of view in this long study, and two preoccupations, one of which gives place from time to time to the other, and also two very different *tones*; and, finally, two works, one of which is historical, the other philosophic, which have never a very close connexion with each other and which must be distinguished one from the other, better than he did it himself, if they are to be well understood. In general, critics and readers have seen only one or other of these points of view, and, according to the one they have adopted, have passed judgment on the work as a whole always incompletely, in a very particular way, and very differently from their neighbour, to such an extent that it was almost impossible to believe that the same work was under discussion. We will try to place ourselves in turn in the two different points of view.

The historical work, which must be sought especially in the

first and the last two volumes, is a brilliant and original continuation of Tocqueville's work. Why is modern France so energetically, so violently centralized, so that individual and freely associated initiative is almost powerless, and that the central authority, whether it be in the hands of one man or an assembly, is, in the proper sense of the word, the only power, the only being, single or collective, which is able to do anything? Tocqueville had already replied: because it was already thus under the old régime; because it is the very movement of France's history; because, for three hundred years, France has been like a being which contracts into its centre—or, more accurately, which creates its vital centre and accumulates its forces there; because the effect of the Revolution was only to hasten this movement and to carry it to its ultimate limit.

There are two successive mistakes, the result of successive illusions of perspective, made in dealing with the shock of 1789.

First, it is false to say that the old régime was absolutism and that the Revolution destroyed absolutism and established Liberty. The Revolution caused only a displacement of absolutism, by placing it within a central deliberating assembly instead of leaving it in a chief surrounded by a council of ministers.

A second mistake which sprang up a little later consisted in the belief that the Revolution did not establish Liberty but destroyed it; that there was less dependence of the parts relatively to the centre before 1789 than after 1800; and that it is despotism which is new and Liberty which is old. This, too, is false; the dependence of parts relative to the centre was as close before 1789 as after 1800. France was a centralized country and had been rapidly tending towards centralization, especially since Louis XIV.; the Revolution was only the last step; it only put the finishing touches to, almost only put in order and sanctioned, a work already accomplished: "it was accomplished when it broke out," as Chateaubriand said.

So, in reality, the Revolution neither destroyed nor created despotism; it gave it a new form.

These are the ideas which Taine, with new facts and a new way of exposing facts, brought to light in the properly historical

part of his *Origins*. France was multiple, complex; various forces were at work there: royalty, nobility, clergy, self-governing provinces enjoying a certain degree of autonomy. Certain of these forces exhausted themselves and gave themselves up. Nobility ceased to be a local aristocracy and became a retinue of royalty; the clergy, under the pretext of constituting its independence relatively to Rome, got support from royalty and set up its dependence relatively to Versailles; the provinces and the communes, half willingly to rid themselves of the authority of the nobles and of the Church, half unwillingly yielding to the encroachments of the extending royalty, lost the last remains of their autonomy. Anything which had been an independent power became an instrument in the king's hands or material submitted to his instruments. "Intermediate powers" were transformed into "functions." The nobles, the clergy and the magistrates became officials; beneath them were the "functioned," those administered. A king, the king's officials and subjects, this is what the old régime had already become.

Only, from their former powers, the aristocratic classes had preserved distinctions, immunities, appearances of authority and money. All these were called privileges. In this way were constituted, within the real or almost real equality of rights, an inequality of possessions, an inequality of satisfaction for self-respect, and titular inequality. This sort of inequality was destroyed by the Revolution.

The first effects were excellent: careers were open (or, rather, more open than formerly) to all; rivalry was stimulated; activity was energetically stimulated; there was a better redistribution of financial burdens; for a time there were even beneficial illusions and prejudices, such as the belief that the French had created a new social order in keeping with Justice, Humanity, Reason and the Ideal.

But later there were disastrous effects; the basis of things had not been touched; the work of centralization had not been stopped; despotism had not been destroyed, but had been transposed from a single head to all—which means to say, since this is only illusion and really all never govern, that it had been transposed from a single head to an assembly which centralized more

than ever, did not readily allow any power outside of itself, either general or local or intermediate, nor any independence, either collective or individual. The basis of things is even somewhat worse; for despotism remains, but it has become unstable, being sometimes transmitted from an assembly to an executive authority, which suppresses or paralyses the assembly; and then, when this executive authority has exhausted itself in functioning or been shattered in some occurrence, reverts to an assembly which takes advantage of the failure or fall of the executive authority; but the changes from one to the other form of similar despotism are violent and ruinous shocks. In 1789 the only gains were a satisfaction of the vanity for equality, a perfecting of the detail of the machinery of government, and a variability in the form of despotism, which, without changing anything at the basis of things, is still a social instability.

It should further be observed that what applies to the national character applies also to the social order itself. It has not changed but it has been modified for the worse, by slipping a little further in the direction of decadence. Since the seventeenth century it has been marked by an absence of individual initiative. And the State has accustomed the individual to make sacrifices to the State; and the individual, through a tendency to rely upon the State, has grown in the habit of abandoning himself to the State, of asking and expecting everything from it. If the State has turned all Frenchmen into civil servants, or into people who want to be civil servants, or into people who put themselves in the hands and under the sway of civil servants, it is also the fact that all Frenchmen have slipped into a state of mind, a conception of life, in which the human being likes to feel, and only wants to be, dependent and protected.

The cause and the effect are confounded here, so much do they conspire to adjust themselves exactly. In this respect there is no change from the old régime to the new, but only an aggravation. The characteristics of the nobility of the old régime have become universal. After some years of individual initiative, which was awakened by this illusion that 1879 had created a new order, came a relapse, even a little deeper, into the old state of mind, an increasingly strong tendency to enter, as an important

or modest or humble or insignificant part, into the machine ordered and inspected by the central authority; consequently came a diminution in characters, energies, wills, and even dignities; an imperceptible and certain decadence, even in the most decent, the most specious, the most attractive material order, and, if you like, the most agreeable to look upon.

The living forces of a nation are individual energy, the energy of independent association, the energy of family tradition, the energy of tradition in caste or class, these last two being only, by the way, forms of the energy of association. When these forms languish the whole body of the State is ill, and can be considered as on the decline.

With a rigorous sequence of deduction, a very wide knowledge, very patient inquiries bringing to light significant facts, penetrating glances into the present condition of France as well as into the last century of the old régime, Taine made this exposition of the evolution of France's social condition from 1700 to 1900 in masterly fashion. He introduced into this very complex question some quite new considerations, to which we must give at least some slight attention.

For instance, in the business of preparation for the French Revolution, Taine gives a place to the influence of "the French classical mind." This was a literary man's idea, the idea of a man who had started with literary history. Probably there are readers for whom this is enough to condemn it. It is no good being so hasty, and examination is worth while. Here is the sequence of Taine's ideas on the subject. There have been from the Renaissance up to our times two parallel movements among minds: a scientific movement and a literary movement. The scientific movement gradually rejected, if not the supernatural, at least the *nearness* of the supernatural, and its presence around and among us, its intervention in earthly affairs, and gave Man another place in nature, fitting him, as it were, into nature, so that it ought to have brought about a kind of overthrow of the conception of the universe, and, where formerly the universe was regarded as having been made on Man's model, it ought to have led to the consideration of Man as made in the same way as the rest of the world, and submitted to similar, that is to say fatal, laws; finally,

it ought to bring about the "uniting of moral sciences with physical sciences," and to make of the former a "continuation" of physical sciences. But, although these last conclusions were foreseen by the eighteenth-century philosophers, and were already made the subject of vague allusions in their works, they were not yet entirely achieved at this epoch, and, at the same time, the literary movement was formulating other and very different conclusions.

At this time the literary movement was the development of the classical mind. In France this mind is quite rational and quite abstractive: it does not like facts; it turns aside from observation and dispenses with it; it likes to make combinations of pure ideas; it invests reasoning with an extraordinary dignity and is led in this way to pronounce reason sovereign. An idea must make everything bow down before it because it is just, and it is considered just, not by the quantity of realities it contains, but by the clarity, precision and rigour which it has in itself, the satisfaction it gives to the mind and its geometric beauty.

Now, in eighteenth-century France there are many things which do not satisfy the mind in this way, which have by no means the beauty and greatness of a big and fine abstract idea, which, in plain language, are not ideas transformed into facts. There is tradition, religion, the State. In the light of pure ideas we owe no respect either to tradition, to religion or to the State. What are their claims? Of what rational idea, of what luminous abstract thought, are they the realization?

Science's reply to this question ought to be: "They are facts, general facts; a particular, as it were accidental, fact can be disregarded (for, though nothing is accidental, there are facts which are transitory and ephemeral consequences of general facts and are negligible); as for general facts, they do not need to be submitted to reason, but much rather reason to them; they have their reason in themselves; they are the consequence and ultimate result 'of a long accumulation of experiences, after a multitude of gropings and experiments.' Thus a tradition, an hereditary prejudice, is 'a sort of reason which is not conscious of itself.' A tradition is a general fact which is only general

because it has answered a certain need or a very high convenience and expediency; it is certain that it still answers this need, perhaps in a less degree, for everything evolves, but still very considerably; and that it is perhaps legitimate to help it to disappear, but probably impossible and certainly dangerous to suppress it at a blow.

"It is the same with religion, moral tradition; it is an historical fact; it is a big fact of the moral history of humanity. These things are only apparently suppressed by a stroke of the pen or a mental gesture; they are reborn the next day, because they have in themselves the force of an extended fact, against which reason is powerless and which disappears only by wearing itself out.

"Similarly, with the State. It is possible that the State, as constituted in the eighteenth century, is not rational; but it is, and has been for a long time; it answers a necessity of things; it can be, has already been, much modified; it is not possible that it should disappear at one blow, because it is not *natural*; if you make it disappear it will be only in appearance; it will rise again the next day, either in the same or a very analogous form; if its form is changed its spirit will remain the same; if its mechanism is repaired its traditions and customs, one might say its psychology, will remain very much the same. Great facts, traditional facts, have a reason of their own, which is no longer conscious of its reasons, but which is right; they are 'like a blind form of reason'; and the reason of facts despises reasoning reason and always ends by being right."

Here is what science might have said to the classical mind in the form of the abstractive mind. It did not say this, or hardly at all, because it was late. Serious history was not made; sociology had not begun. The conservative conclusions of science had not been arrived at. Science had not yet instilled into minds the idea that Man was made like the rest of the world and that the laws governing societies are at any rate analogous to those of nature.

Now, amid this silence of science, the literary mind was carrying on its work. With its ideological mania and its taste for pure ideas it built up a man who was only an idea, an

abstract man, who has no connexion with historical man; a man who is born free (a thing which never happens), and who must remain free; a man who is born equal to any other from every point of view (Helvétius at least said so), and who must remain the equal of all others; a man made for happiness, since he desires it, and who has the right to it; a man, finally, who must not lose in society either his original liberty, his equality of birth, or his right to happiness; which leads Liberals to end up with the theory of national sovereignty and the more rigorous logicians with the abolition of society.

Opposed to this fantastic man, created by the unfettered operation of abstraction, science could set up the true man, him whom physiology on the one hand and history on the other reveal to those who are fond of facts; but, for reasons we have already mentioned, science does not cry out very loudly, and has not yet very clear conclusions on this subject.

The French Revolution was the outcome of this predominance of the literary over the scientific mind, and of the fact that the scientific mind had, so to speak, let the literary mind get on ahead of it.

This ingenious theory is not entirely false, and it is one of the most interesting and amusing, in the best sense of the word, which has been exposed to us by historical philosophers. The feeble point of it is the transformation of the classical mind, properly so called, into the abstractive mind. The reasons for the transformation of minds such as Racine's, Molière's and La Fontaine's into those of Condillac and Condorcet are not self-evident, and seem to demand much more explanation than Taine has given. The point is, that Taine did not need evidence, because for him there was not even a transformation from the literary mind of 1660 to that of 1760. Taine had always considered the French classical mind as purely and simply abstractive. Whenever he wanted to speak of them, in his *Critical and Historical Essays* for instance, he showed us the seventeenth-century writers as logicians, reasoners, orators, whose whole merit and art lay in their ability to expose general ideas broadly, luminously and in a well-regulated fashion.

This is how he saw them, how he had been taught to see them,

and early education has often a lasting influence, even upon great minds. Literary education in the middle of the nineteenth century consisted entirely in teaching the art of exposing in the best possible way general ideas, and, consequently, among great classical writers it sought only models of that art; and, since it looked only for writers of this sort, it found no others, as is natural; so that, instead of the education being influenced by the models, the models were influenced by the education. Taine retained something, even a great deal, of this way of looking at things.

And finally Boileau, who certainly rendered great services—though also, to some slight extent, disservices—to his contemporaries, has some share in interpreting the art of our classical writers. He said so often, "Therefore love reason," that this motto was taken as the motto of the seventeenth-century writers, and as the definition of the classical mind, which would not have been wrong if the word "reason" had been taken in the sense which Boileau gave to it. But in Boileau "reason," as can be verified in *every* passage in which the word occurs, is used in contradistinction to "fantasy," "caprice" and "imagination," and means precisely "imitation of nature" and "observation of nature"; hence it follows that it meant and prescribed just the opposite of what Taine believed it meant and prescribed. The tendency of the seventeenth-century classics, whose abandonment of the observation of reality was bewailed by Taine, was precisely in the direction of observation of this kind, by way of reaction against their predecessors, and Boileau urged them in, and praised them for, this tendency. It is perhaps the most completely false construction that has ever been put upon the interpretation of a text and of literary history.

And, as a fact, the men of 1660 are, properly speaking, realists, from Racine to La Fontaine, from Molière to La Bruyère, from La Rochefoucauld to Bourdaloue, from Mme de Sévigné to Saint-Simon, and no other literary school gave more attention to the "study of the Court and understanding of the town."

Thus it is a question which needs explanation, how this

classical mind became the mind of abstraction, ideology and "reasoning reason."

And it must also be explained that even in the eighteenth century this ideological and idea-loving mind was nowhere nearly as general as Taine tried to make out. Voltaire did not have it, as Taine recognized; Montesquieu had it, but with an understanding of the multiplicity of elements in things and a knowledge of historical realities which corrected it; Diderot had it, but, at the same time, in half his works he is such a "realist," such an observer of reality and a collector of small true detail, in the style even of Taine's dream, that at any rate his philosophic practices cannot have been derived from his conception of art, nor can his philosophic conceptions have been acquired from his artistic habits. The same applies, but even more reasonably and in a much more immediately obvious way, to Rousseau.

And so the part played by the classical literary mind in the formation of the revolutionary mind is reduced almost to nothing. It is very feeble. Whether it be for the purpose of praising or blaming them, it is not very reasonable to consider either Molière or Racine or La Fontaine or Boileau, or even Bossuet, even if he be the greatest of all artists in general ideas, as the precursors of the French Revolution.

Taine was inclined here to give way to the attraction of a new and original idea. His master, Auguste Comte, had given as the distant but real causes of the French Revolution the development of the examining mind, the scientific movement —the development of the metaphysical mind. Taine attached himself particularly to this latter consideration, giving it a new form. He is less likely to have found the truth than his famous predecessor.

And, then, it is possible that those are even more right who see in the French Revolution especially an economic revolution with economic causes. All the great human commotions must not be explained by economic causes. There have been movements of humanity which have had moral causes. But, both in antiquity before the Christian era and in modern times since Christianity lost its dominant influence, any big revolution can

very reasonably—and perhaps must—be looked upon as an economic crisis and its effects; and, although he did not neglect this point of view, Taine did not attach sufficient importance to it, or gave to others an importance relatively exaggerated.

As for the conclusions of this inquiry into the constitution of modern France, they must not be hastily put aside by reason of their pessimism, which would be puerile, nor must they be accepted so passionately that they are made the starting-point for a whole policy of retrogression, which would be very idle. Those who talk, as devoted students of Hippolyte Taine, of destroying the deadly work of the French Revolution, forget two things, one of which did not escape him and the other, while not escaping him, did not impress itself sufficiently upon his mind. The first is that the work—whether deadly, beneficial or, more probably, a mixture of good and bad—of the French Revolution is not the work of the French Revolution, but of French history over a period of three centuries. After Tocqueville, Taine, Albert Sorel, and many others, this fact should be accepted in the end practically as a conviction.

If the work of the Revolution is the natural consequence of the history of France itself, it is legitimized by this fact, if not in law, at any rate in fact; it is legitimized in the same way as a fact which is embraced by a more general fact; it loses its character of an accident to assume the character of the application of a law; a law is a fact, bigger than others, which, by embracing them, explains them. The more it is proven that the Revolution did not invent anything, the more it will be proved that nothing can be done against it and that there is nothing with which it can be reproached; the more it is proven that it did nothing new, the more it will also be proved that it is "historic," and hence unimpeachable; and the more it is proven that it did nothing, the more it will be proved that its work is good. It is only an incident in the centralizing movement which has been going on in France since 1600, and even from a much earlier time; so it is a movement in the physiological development of France, and it would be necessary to react against the whole of this physiological development, which would probably be fatal, even if it were possible.

Therefore the accusation which complains that the Revolution believed that it was a Revolution, when it was not so, helps to acquit it. It resembles that form of hostility against Christianity which consists in saying that Christianity existed many years before the Jews; Jesus' importance can be lessened in this way, but that of Christianity is increased; it becomes the ultimate cause of antiquity and the centre of the general movement of humanity as a whole. Similarly, if the Revolution is considered simply as a point, fairly striking, in the continuous line of French history from 1600 up to our times, the revolutionaries become less important but the Revolution becomes more imposing and more unimpeachable; it is not an upheaval but a normal development; it is the central point of the natural evolution of France's history. The truth is probably that in the French Revolution there is both a revolution and an evolution, a natural sequence from what precedes and an agitation which, by precipitating in an abnormal way the natural course of things, breaks that sequence. And the revolutionary part of the Revolution was the decrepit part, while the evolutionary part was the lasting part.

The revolutionary part of the Revolution consisted in optimistic dreaming: belief in the happiness of all assured by the State; Liberty in a centralized, complicated, vast society having formidable neighbours; Equality in a society where hierarchy does, and must, exist and where inequality of fortunes exists; Fraternity in a society where freedom of competition is maintained; many other chimeras, and, for their realization, the employment of force, violences, passions and cruelties. And this, too, is the part which was decrepit and which, nevertheless, has left throughout the nineteenth century, in minds, in doctrines, in prejudices, even a little in customs, debris and remains, which time has worn, which the needs of social existence have gradually almost eliminated, but which have, even so, a considerable place in our contemporary history, as it is easy to see.

But in centralization and the levelling process are to be found the evolutionary and permanent part of the Revolution. Centralization consists in one single law instead of different laws and

customs, this law being imposed on the provinces, whose habits and ideas can be thus opposed, precisely with the object of suppressing provinces and finally abolishing particularism; a single government (which was already an accomplished fact); abolition of provincial autonomies, of free or half-free towns, of safe positions on the pretext of religion, of states within the State; one single national council, a central parliament, which makes the law, superintends its application, looks after the administration and is ultimately the true head, which knows all about financial affairs; so that departments and communes, even for their domestic economy and the employment of their own resources for their own needs, will be eternally protected, and all the living forces of the nation will be gathered into the centre to be directed, distributed and apportioned by the centre.

The levelling process is only a form of centralization, in reality; it meant the abolition of classes, of nobility, of the clergy, of the magistracy, of workers' corporations, of aristocracy, or even of the aristocratic element in the nation. The class, group, hereditary association or association maintaining itself by any means for a period of time is again (nothing is more true) a state within a State, a moral free town, an entrenched camp, a secure position; it is something constituted within the heart of the Republic; if centralization is to be made complete there must be no other constituted body in the State but the State itself, and throughout the length and breadth of the territory nothing but individuals.

The lasting effects of the Revolution were centralization and the levelling process, because it only put the finishing touches to these; because this work had been that of French royalty, with the collaboration of the nation itself, for two or even three centuries. This part of the Revolution's work is its solid achievement, just because it is not its work. The same could be said of the work of each century, perhaps of any man (I do not speak of works of art).

Taine would say that this fact does not prevent the legacy from being disastrous. Possibly, but that strengthens the belief that it is necessary. For—and this is the second consideration that I said is often forgotten and that Taine himself somewhat

overlooked—French centralization is not only the work of the French Revolution; it is not the work only of French history; it is the work of European history. Men never centralize themselves for their pleasure; men never diminish their personal autonomy and their right of free association with the single object of diminishing themselves. Big centralized agglomerations are caused by continued or always imminent wars, by the perpetual state of war, either in the form of war itself or of war-like preparations in peace. The enormous centralizing machine of the Roman Empire had no other reason for existing.

Without generalizing on the subject, it is worth pointing out only that the state of war is the normal state of Europe since the Middle Ages. It is the reason for the formation of great states; for people have constituted themselves into great states to escape war; and war is the effect of the formation of great states; since, far from escaping by being concentrated in great nations, peoples have only caused war to be more violent. Concentration comes as the first result of the state of war; as a second result, in the big nation formed by concentration, comes increasingly strong centralization; as a third result, in the concentrated and centralized nation, comes the levelling process. Europe, after a thousand years of local wars and four hundred years of wars between great nations, has turned—has had to turn—by a sort of mechanical necessity, into big centralized democracies, based on equality, with a despotic government, either dynastic or republican. Europe is five or six camps. Hence, it is obvious that, as Taine says, the State is a "barracks." Now, neither in a camp nor in a barracks can there be either liberty, free association or autonomy in the "mess," as Taine would say, for he likes to follow up metaphors in a restrained sort of way.

If, then, the permanent work of the Revolution is the work not only of French history, but of all European history, it may be bad, but it has within it a force, invincible to attack if not to criticism, and to destruction if not to correction. It is only in the detail that it can be reformed, which, by the way, I believe to be passionately desirable: but the mass of it will remain.

I said that there were two distinct parts, whatever may have been the author's desire, in *The Origins of Contemporary France*, one in which Taine was guided by the desire to see his way clearly through the historical transformations of France—and this is the one that we have just been examining; the other in which Taine obeyed a rather unconscious desire to carry on his studies of Mankind.

The old, gloomy, bitter moralist, whom we have already considered, reappeared again when Taine had penetrated somewhat deeply into the history of the French Revolution. Loyal to his practice of studying organs in their pathological state, as he had observed intelligence among idiots, he observed the sensibility, passions, dreams and chimeras among the men associated with the French Revolution. In this he verified his pessimism and misanthropy. The primitive cannibal, the "gorilla," which he had always glimpsed or seen clearly beneath the surface of Mankind, showed up fully to him in this period of violent commotions and unbridled passions. It is not a "sectarian" who dwells with such complacency upon the horrors, miseries and scenes of savagery of the revolutionary epoch; it is the author of *Thomas Graindorge*, the La Rochefoucauld or the Chamfort of 1855, who was not displeased to recognize and to show how far true and well-founded were his original general opinions of Man.

Hence this passionate care to pick out in the "anarchies," either spontaneous or organized, in all the social troubles of this period, anything which shows the extent to which Man, bereft of the burden of secular constraints, is a blind, deluded, furious and cruel animal. Taine's secret preoccupation in writing these pages, which created so much sensation, was to study the human temper in one of Man's crises of ill-health.

The method is not bad, on condition that it is only complementary and supplementary. I believe that intelligence cannot be realized when foolishness is not known; I believe also that Man cannot be understood when he has not been seen in a revolutionary period; but, first, intelligence must be studied in its state of equilibrium, and man at a normal epoch. For, in the end, these traditional constraints which make Man what we see him to be are made by Man, and have been instituted by him

to repress himself and keep himself upright; they are part of him; he is himself in them, and he can be studied in them as he can be studied when he has freed himself from them.

It is said that when society is overthrown Man's basic quality is shown up. Why should the basic quality appear at that moment and not at another? Where is the basic quality? Is it Man's basic quality which makes ordered societies or which overthrows them? The truth is that there is no basic quality, or we have no means of knowing it. There are various parts of the human temperament, and at different periods one part or another dominates. A bloody revolution proves that Man is sometimes bloodthirsty, nothing more, just as a pacific and ordered society proves that Man has orderly instincts, which, however, cannot be relied on, and nothing more. But we know no more about "Man's basic quality" than about "primitive Man." The truth on this matter, as on many others, will always be fragmentary.

Moreover, although it is true that it is especially the pessimistic philosopher who has written the really narrative pages of *The Origins of Contemporary France*, it must be added that the tone in which these pages are written sometimes betrays something in Taine which is not the calm of a philosopher, even a pessimistic one. Many passages savour of indignation, hate and anger, a fact which has caused some amusement to Taine's critics. "What!" they say. "You are a resolute determinist, and you can condemn or stigmatize! If there is no sort of free will in Man, the man who commits a crime is no more a cause for anger than the plant which secretes a poison! Here is a naturalist who studies men as a naturalist and believes that there is no other way of studying them, but, instead of pointing out the good and the evil they have done, with an equally indifferent curiosity, he ends up by declaiming against them as would a preacher:

"'Vous êtes fataliste et vous vous emportez!'"

This is true; but it serves to prove once again the fact that a system never takes such entire possession of a man as to abolish in him the innate instincts, which may be illusions, but are

probably the very conditions of our existence and are the root, as it were, of our general feelings. The philosopher who does not believe in human liberty believes in his own liberty, or acts as if he believed in it, or as if he were only pretending not to believe in it. He confesses this, when he is sincere, by saying: " I am deceived by an illusion by which I must be deceived in order to be able to live, and I can rid myself of it only when I lead an intellectual life." Similarly, Taine does not believe in human liberty, yet cannot prevent himself from getting angry, as if he believed in it, when he contemplates acts which are crimes only if it exists. We are enveloped in the tissue of necessary beliefs in such a way that we can come again under their sway as soon as our sentiments interfere with our ideas. Taine allowed his sentiments to mix with his ideas in writing the history of the French Revolution ; but there would have been something forced in an attempt to prevent this mixture from being or showing itself ; he would have had to force himself to seem cold, when it was possible for the philosopher but impossible for the man to be so. And, in the end, if it is sincerity alone which is of importance, *The Origins of Contemporary France* gain something from the fact that the author's sincerity has not been smothered by a sort of philosophic constraint ; and they are already systematic enough to give cause for rejoicing rather than for regrets when, from time to time, they forget to be systematic in order to be living.

VI

Taine's general conclusions on Man and human life, society and social life, will not need to be developed at length. They can be foreseen and guessed from what precedes.

The world, of which it is not given to Man to know either the cause or the aim, nor whether it has aim or cause, is, so far as the observer is concerned, a machine governed by invariable and rigorous laws, with which no particular will interferes to interrupt their action or modify them. These laws, besides being more complicated and delicate, have the same rigorous and invariable character in the animal kingdom, which includes Man, as in all the rest of nature. The general laws of the animal world

are, on the one hand, over-production, and, on the other, the survival of the fittest—that is to say, its general law is warfare. Nature has given to each animal species such a power of reproduction that a single species, left to itself, would populate the planet in a small number of years and would find itself cramped for space; and all the countless different species have this same power; this is the law of over-production. So the species have to limit themselves by combat, disputing among themselves the too-limited territory and exterminating each other.

This is what happens: either they live on each other, or they fight among themselves and contend for the common matter on which they live; the fittest species survive, and, in each species, the fittest individuals; fitness implies either offensive or defensive forces—such as skill, cunning, natural armour, tenuity, greater or more rapid power of multiplication, which repairs the slaughter and overcomes it quickly, etc. This is the law of the survival of the fittest.

These two laws can be summed up in one as warfare, universal massacre for existence, death for life. Out of a thousand births only one survives; out of ten adults only one survives; the figures are, if anything, underestimates. Death, then, is what is general; the life of an individual is an event, an unhoped-for success, an unlikely happiness, an unheard-of chance. If Nature could be personified it could be said that animal life is a cruel game, by which Nature calls to life an immense number of beings in order to make some kill others and to let some suffer a little longer than the others. Without personification of any sort, let us say that animal life has its law, which is a tragic law. It is no good to talk of the "presence" of evil on earth; the exact truth is that animal life is the reign, the absolute reign, of what Man calls evil.

Man himself lives in and under this law. He is eaten by animals and eats them: on the other hand, he makes war on his own species, between nation and nation, which is peculiar to animal life and has led to the belief that the human species is not a single species, and that at the bottom of all international laws is a race war, and at the bottom of all race wars a war of species. This is of little importance; what is certain is that between

nations, and in each nation between individuals, there is a struggle for life exactly similar to the great war which is waged throughout the whole animal kingdom. There, too, evil reigns, and at the bottom of human life, as of animal life, is fear of destruction, desire to destroy in order to be preserved.

Man, in this abyss, has found some consolations, on the one hand, and, on the other, some salvation. He has created religions because he had imagination, and he invented science because he had memory and a faculty for abstraction.

Religions are hasty syntheses of the fragmentary notions that Man has of the universe. They give him for a time a general hypothesis, explanatory of all he sees, and to which he strongly attaches his belief. This gives him a security and gives his thought a temper; it diminishes for a time his eternal anxiety.

Religions are also synthetic formulæ of the instincts of a race. Their founders, at a given moment, "pronounced the only word, were it heroic or moving, enthusiastic or soporific, which hearts and minds around and after them wanted to hear, the only one which was adapted to profound needs, accumulated aspirations, hereditary faculties and to a whole mental and moral structure." In this respect they are an essential element and energetic ferment in communal life. They concentrate the nation or race, give it a conscience, increase its life tenfold, make it very strong, diminish within its heart the struggle between individuals, put "evil" into the background, and also hurl the nation thus fortified against others, and thus "the evil" reappears.

And, finally, religions are "great metaphysical poems accompanied by beliefs"; not only do they explain the universe to Man, who has an insuperable need for such explanation; not only do they gather together his general instincts into a single, very noble instinct, but also they attract, lull and enchant his imagination.

Such are the three chief functions of religions and the three services which religion renders to Man; they reassure, strengthen and enrapture him, and in these three ways they are a consolation to him. This is something, though it is not much. Whatever they do, religions live on the generous instincts which are already

in the human heart; they give them back to him, it is true, stronger than when they were taken from him, and this is their magical function, as it were; but in the end they have no qualities which Man had not already. Now, these instincts are relatively weak in man and cannot be strong. It comes back to this, that religions are the desire experienced by Man to escape from his natural law, which he condemns and detests; to escape from the law of the struggle for life, from the law of egoism, from the law of cruelty, from the law of death. To say that a sentiment is a being's desire to escape from his law is to say that he is both violent and weak, that he will have vehement outbursts, but that he will have long periods of exhaustion, and that, always destined to be reborn, he is especially condemned to be eternally vanquished. Religions are touching and venerable; they are, in humanity's history, moral facts of extraordinary importance; but they are at once too much the exact opposite of the law governing Man and the expression of his desire, so that they are both Man's eternal consolers and eternal deceivers.

If religions have been Man's consolation, science has been his weapon. By means of it he has conquered the world, as he likes to put it, given some security to life, prolonged his existence, created unknown forces in his struggle with nature and death.

This, again, is something, but not much; for since the greatest enemy of Man is Man, so long as he has not got rid, on the one hand, of war between men, and, on the other, of the war which his evil passions carry on in each man, he will have attained nothing; in other words, so long as moral progress is not effected it cannot be said that any sort of progress has been accomplished. Now it is an illusion to believe that any moral progress has been, and is, the effect of scientific progress. In satisfying needs the effect of science is only to create others, in gratifying desires to arouse fresh ones; just as it only arms men more powerfully in the struggle against each other without in the slightest degree stilling the desire for, and deadening the stimulants of, this struggle. Thus it establishes neither inward peace nor peace between one man and another. Hence, where is the improvement? Is Man in a better condition? No, since he has not changed. Is he happier? No, since he is not better. He is

always the beast of prey and of combat, who murders his fellow "for a bit of raw fish." The only difference is that to-day the fish is cooked. The more so-called progresses due to science are examined, the more it is obvious that they come down to differences of this sort. The future of science will consist in the granting of increasingly big satisfactions and increasingly keen excitements to Man's desires. It gives, very probably, an exact compensation but, consequently, no improvement. The final result is the same.

Therefore no belief and no hope should be placed in this "new idol" of science. The illusion in this case is quite natural; for science changes the world, but it is Man that it ought to change; and science does not go round, like philosophies and religions, in an eternal circle; it goes straight forward, it progresses; to one lot of conquests it adds others without destroying those it already has. For this reason there is a belief that it achieves something. It is true that science acts, but it does nothing for us, nothing from which we can acquire a real gain. It is much more external to us than is commonly supposed: because it changes the planet, modifying its external appearance, the flora, fauna and geographical outline, without changing us ourselves in the slightest; so that what we achieve by means of science seems to be a gigantic work accomplished for the pleasure of some sublime witnesses who watch us with curiosity from a corner in space. But the benefit that comes to us from so many efforts is a mere nothing.

Undoubtedly we cannot escape from scientific work; we have embarked upon it; each step we take puts us under the almost physical necessity of taking a second; partly out of curiosity, partly forced by the exigencies of competition and the struggle for existence, either between men or between peoples, we pursue scientific work indefinitely; but do not let us be so ingenuous as to believe that it leads us either to moral or even physical happiness; it leads us to other ways of desiring, lusting, struggling and suffering.

Then what ought we to believe, or rather—since quite obviously there is no chance of our believing in anything—which side ought we to take? The first bit of advice "for everybody"

is to work in order to live; then, secondly, "for some," during the periods of rest when man needs a philosophy and ethics, to be sustained by thoughts of resignation, or, if possible, to rise to the delights of artistic contemplation. To everybody it can be said: "Try to harden your patience and your courage. Accustom your being to put up worthily with what is necessary. Avoid grotesque distortions and agitations. In the long run, human misfortunes will seem quite natural. The best fruit of science is cold resignation, which gives peace to the soul and reduces suffering to bodily pain." And for the few the advice is: "When you have fired your shot, and earned your evening meal, leave the mercenaries to beat the plain; let them burden themselves and return to gorge themselves. What need have you to encumber yourself and retard your progress? Look around you, here is a less animal occupation: contemplation. That wide plain is hazy and sparkling beneath the generous sun which warms it; those ragged woods repose in delicious comfort on the luminous azure which borders them; those fragrant pines rise like censers upon a carpet of reddish heather. You have spent an hour during which you have not been a brute; you can almost boast of having lived."

Resignation and contemplation, science and scientific philosophy, come back to the conception of life which was that of certain religious orders. The truth is that science, when it does not deceive itself, can only teach Man his pettiness and the vanity of his efforts, and reaches the same conclusions as religion, without hope.

As for Man considered in society, and the way in which men should be organized on earth, Taine had no advice to give, either to his fellow-citizens or his fellows. His belief, which was expressed in the last words of his *Notes on England* and would no doubt have been expressed at the end of his *Origins of Contemporary France* if he had finished it, was that the history of each people was in keeping with its physiological organism, its essential tendencies, the inner forces and weaknesses in the depths of its temperament, and that, consequently, each people has, at each stage in its evolution, the political régime which is in keeping with the precedents and "momentum" of this

evolution. A people no more makes its history than a man his life, and perhaps even less—supposing that in this matter there is any question of more or less. Hence, no advice can be given and there cannot be any didactic politics.

As for his preferences, Taine did not conceal them and they are already known. The best political constitutions, the best social organisms, are those which are consistent with Nature. Now Nature has made Man essentially unequal. "The good God is aristocratic," said a man of the people during the Revolution one day when rain spoiled a riot. It can be said that Nature is aristocratic. Nature it is which has placed extraordinary differences between one man and another; she it is, too, which has predisposed men to form class hierarchies. Selection alone makes superior men; a nation's "staff" can be recruited only from one class, subjected to a certain secular régime. The course of civilization serves only to confirm and further to attest what Nature establishes; a society which lasts, and which is raised from the rudimentary state to the state of civilization, is nothing but an organism which becomes complicated; an organism which is becoming complicated permits, and creates because it permits, the division and subordination of functions—that is to say, in political language, specialization and hierarchy.

Thus the more civilized a society the more the citizens are forced to specialize each in his branch of work, and to become more and more subordinate to Government organs placed one above the other. Indeed it is the régime of intermediate classes dependent upon each other, or of "intermediate dependent authorities," of which Montesquieu spoke. It happens that in a society thus formed by nature itself, and as a result of the work of ages, a prejudice, a rational opinion, accepted with enthusiasm, introduces government of all by all. By definition government of all by all is opposed to specialization, to competence, to subordination, to hierarchy—in a word, to Nature. It is an anti-scientific, anti-historical and anti-natural form of government. It is not likely to survive and its only effect is a weakening, perhaps fairly rapid, of the social body.

But once more each people follows its temperament and cannot do otherwise. All that can be said is that that people is

more happy than others whose own temperament is more consistent with the general indications of Nature and with the general nature of humanity. To be exceptional by temperament is dangerous.

VII

So it is seen that Taine expressed, with the assiduous probity which was the basis of his character, his opinion on the majority of questions in which modern humanity is interested. He expressed it loyally, scrupulously and sadly. He was sad. The reason for this is fairly easy to see. He did not believe in religion, and his only love was science, though he did not believe in it, or, it might be better to say, he only believed in science but had no expectation from it.

In that lay his originality. The men who were carried away by the admirable scientific movement of the nineteenth century were not merely carried away: they were enchanted by it. They put their hope in it. They all believed more or less, and only with the differences which greater or less temperamental ardour gives to the intensity of hopefulness, that the improvement, even moral, the progress, the uplifting, the "salvation," of humanity lay in science and depended on its conquests. In a word, science was their faith. They were all Condorcets, more or less enthusiastic, more or less candid, more or less reserved. Taine, perhaps alone, had reverence without faith, zeal without belief, in science.

Cousin had completely disgusted him with hasty acts of faith. As another had said, "I will not make hypotheses," he said, "I will not make any act of faith." Indeed, his probity would have held him back, if he had needed to be restrained, from descending to any such thing. He saw in any confidence or any abandonment to confidence something not far removed from a mild sort of charlatanism, which deceives others as well as oneself. Consequently he viewed everything with a cold eye, and was inquisitive without eagerness, diligent without excitement, obstinate without hope, and disillusioned beforehand.

His didactic and even peremptory tone must not be allowed

to deceive his readers. It is not his thought but his method which is dogmatic. He believes his method is good and it is the only thing in which he has confidence; but of science he believes nothing more than that perhaps it is true, limited, necessary and, on a final analysis, useless. Being true, it is a satisfaction to the mind; but when it loyally resigns itself to being *really true*, its sphere is so limited that it no longer satisfies the liveliest and eternal curiosities of the mind. It is necessary and Man cannot cease to utilize this instrument which has helped him to become what he is; but, since it does not improve him in his basic qualities, it has only apparent utility, and constitutes yet another of those illusions which Man destroys when he seeks beneath the surface of it.

Thus, Taine gave to humanity an example of a worker attached to work from which he expects no result. The impression of grave melancholy which is left when his works are read arises from this absence of any enthusiasm, of any confidence and of any hope. He inspires a pessimism which does not even smack of the tonic of bitterness. We move with him through a narrow world, whose distant avenues are forbidden our curiosities, which is neither beautiful nor good, and which will become neither more beautiful nor better. The eighteenth-century philosophers, some of them at least, had brought hope down from heaven to earth; Taine banished it from the earth without reinstalling it in heaven.

He had a very great influence. The taste for pessimism crops up periodically in humanity. We grow weary of everything, even of hope, as a very isolated verse of Lamartine's tells us. There are periods when men like, for a time, to cease being deluded and to remain motionless and thoughtful and experience "the gloomy pleasures of a melancholy heart." Sometimes this period lasts a number of years, if certain painful circumstances are joined to this need born of certain deceptions.

After the romantic period, when melancholy was hardly more than a pose, and when enthusiasm, artistic gaieties and beautiful intoxications were very plentiful, the French soul had already begun to grow gloomy when Taine started to write; it became more gloomy still after 1870; Taine was character-

istic of the general mental condition. Also his influence crept even into contemporary literature; the novel, from 1870, and the theatre too, from 1880, had very marked pessimistic and misanthropic tendencies. Although he would not like to have the influence of his mind discovered in productions which he abhorred, it is very difficult not to find him in them.

As a matter of fact, he did have not only an influence in the direction we have just mentioned, but also one in quite an opposite direction. The reaction against positivism and pessimism, the attempt at spiritual renaissance which is going on at the present moment, must be attributed partly to him. Very methodical and very systematic men always provoke reactions against their thought, and are really the authors of such reaction. There is no reaction against minds which are either so flexible or so comprehensive that they expose both the theses and antitheses of their doctrine, their thought and, at the same time, the objection which can be made to it. Such writers have admirers, imitators, above all readers and, in a way, spectators; they have no very precise disciples or critics. Voltaire had disciples and adversaries in only one part of his work—that in which he was decisive, peremptory and stubborn. But men who give to a general thought the form of a doctrine, and to this doctrine the disposition of a system, who gather and put together in a clearly defined monument the limited material of a whole harmonious conception, such men give rise to two generations, which would not have existed, at any rate so precisely, without them: the first of disciples, the second of opponents.

Positivism—not the sort practised by Auguste Comte, which attacked itself, or, at least, enlarged itself to such an extent that unheeding minds forgot the sharpness of its original outlines; but Taine's sort, which was contracted and gathered together into itself and presented to men in all its precision and in the dryness of its close definitions—had to have its school and to create an opposing school; resolute disciples, quite sure of what they were defending; determined adversaries well aware of what they wanted to attack; and Taine was the father of the former and the grandfather of the latter.

So the intellectual movement of which Taine is the starting-point was very considerable, and occupies a large place in the history of European thought. The future will disclose its remote consequences to us. For the moment, it is sufficient glory for a man born in 1828 that the movement to which he gave rise should be in 1899 one of the preoccupations of the human mind.

ERNEST RENAN

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I

Ernest Renan seems to have been placed in the world "by a nominative decree of Providence"—to borrow one of his expressions—to demonstrate to men what is *intellect*, giving to this word its full meaning; what are its powers of flexibility; the successive expansions of which it is capable; the action it can have even on character; the natural transformations it can undergo; the gymnastics in which it can indulge; and even the digressions to which it can give rise as it moves hurriedly on its way.

Speaking in the language of the classical epoch, Renan was eminently a man of *parts*. He was born to have, and never to tire of having, ideas; to understand, and never to tire of understanding, all other people's ideas, at least as well as they themselves; to live easily and voluptuously, and as in his natural element, in the most intense and comprehensive spiritual life, which, although it was full of certain contradictions, was also extremely harmonious when he liked. Renan is a man whose intellect outweighed all other faculties and dominated his whole being.

His character, the first part of his character—for there were at least two parts to it—was, on the whole, fairly helpful to his intellect. He was mild, timid, patient and obstinate. He was thus equipped from the first to adhere infinitely to his ideas, which is a way of never having any. But he was extremely inquisitive, and very strongly upright, both intellectually and morally. Curiosity and probity are, indeed, the two sentiments to which he gave the most honourable place, a proof that he was conscious of them very strongly in himself. He always called science a "noble inquisitiveness," and he seemed to reverence it especially in virtue of its inquisitiveness; and all his life he reserved the greatest praise for—and, moreover, practised more than once—acts of courageous probity and absolute integrity. This part of his character, which was very fine, by the way, did not offer too much resistance at first to the soaring of his conquering intellect. He was sufficiently inquisitive to inquire into ideas of all kinds,

sufficiently intelligent to grasp them and to measure their import at once, sufficiently obstinate not to be easily detached from his original ideas; and so he managed to keep all his original ideas while unceasingly acquiring new ones, to enlarge thus indefinitely the circle of his conceptions, always to make additions without making eliminations, an exercise which gave full scope to the strength of his intellect and pleasure to its activeness. And, finally, his mind became, as it were, the sports field, the battleground and the meeting-place where all possible ideas gathered pacifically.

And his career was that of a mind incessantly increasing in wealth, so happy in its possessions as to take a certain delight in their splendour and ostentation, especially taking delight in their acquisition and ordered accumulation; but sometimes finding them a source of amusement. Renan's life is the story of the fortune-making of an intellect, and there are times when good fortune favours it.

His first faith was the Christian faith, in all its purity and its severity. He believed naïvely, ardently, joyfully. His first masters, who were Catholic priests, inspired in him a veneration for, and attachment to, religion, which never completely forsook him; for his sentiments, like his ideas, were tenacious and made room for new arrivals without being ousted by them. He believed everything in religion as it was taught to him, and such belief was bound to die out; but what he liked, and was destined never to leave off liking, about religion, was the moral elevation, the austerity, the purity, the habit of living with a pure idea, of loving it, of communing perpetually with it and of never feeling the need for anything else. There are parts of religion which Renan never seems to have experienced very deeply. Neither charity, nor humility, nor the instinct of human fraternity seems to have been very passionately realized by him, although these sentiments were known to him. But the soul's seclusion in the face of, or rather at the heart of, the mystery, a very rich, very silent and rather jealous inner life, the withdrawal into contemplation; these were things which enveloped Renan and left their eternal imprint upon him. Religion, for him, was "perpetual adoration," and he never completely abandoned that religion.

In addition he had a certain taste for *dignity*. Religion, the clerical state especially, but the condition of a religious soul itself, were for Renan a distinction. When he was young, horror of vulgarity, of easy pleasures, of the habit of low thinking, of anything that was rather coarse and stupid, made up the half of Renan's religion. He tells us that, when he was quite a child, he did not like the company of little boys, whose noisy games and shouts of joy distressed him, but was happier with little girls, calm, good and neat. Women, his mother first of all and then his sister, had an immense influence upon him. His soul was always feminine in many respects. He loved religion rather as women do, and for the same reasons. He saw, either in the priest or simply in the religious man, a being who is out of the ordinary, who cultivates certain qualities of his mind and soul, which, by isolating him, purify him. This conception is not only rather undemocratic, but it is rather inclined not to be very Christian; but there are very many and very different ways of understanding a religion, and especially of experiencing it! This was his way. He belonged to the Church. Amid the rather confused and agitated vastness of humanity he took pleasure in the contemplation of a select, fairly elevated group of minds, not refined, but serious, meditative, reserved, almost shy, and inclined to say to the rest of the world: *Noli me tangere*; and he was not displeased to belong to a group so constituted.

He was mild, good and tender, but far from being familiar. His proud and rather distrustful timidity would not permit it. At the end of thirty successful years, during which fortune smiled upon him and he was much sought after, he endeavoured and pretended to be sociable without ever really being so. Religion was for him a selection, a way of avoiding somewhat, and preserving oneself from, disagreeable contacts and degrading infections. There are souls whose skin, so to speak, is very sensitive, and for them what is called Society is a sort of promiscuousness. Almost all through time—the "mystic" religions and esoteric philosophies of antiquity are there to bear witness to this truth—souls of this sort have sought, in the heart of society, properly speaking, a religious society, and even in the heart of religious society a more reserved sanctuary, more or

less protected and cloistered, where sounds are softer, movements slower, the atmosphere calmer, the thought, though it be the same, purer and as if more penetrated by silence. In his youth Renan found a sort of Orphism in the Catholic religion and the clerical state.

And, finally, his artistic instincts found in such an atmosphere a satisfaction which they never found so well anywhere else and which they never failed to find there. His mind was French, Gascon he even called it; but his soul was Breton always, Northern rather; his conception of beauty, his poetic taste, were always somewhat out of sympathy with the South. He never really liked classical literature, even the antique; and he really could not tolerate French literature previous to Chateaubriand. Even among moderns the violent uproar of Victor Hugo hurt him. A rather pale and melancholy art, where misty seas, coasts with black rocks and mysterious forests are depicted, was better suited to his spiritual nature. When he becomes a poet himself he brings Ossian to mind: "I was born, O goddess of the blue eyes, of savage parents, among the good and virtuous Cimmerians, who live on the shores of a dark sea, studded with rocks and always swept by storms. The sun is hardly known there; the flowers are the sea-foam, the sea-weeds and the many-coloured shells which are found in the depths of secluded bays. Clouds seem to be colourless there, and even joy is tinged with sadness; but fountains of cold water issue from the rocks and the eyes of maidens are like these green fountains where, on a background of waving grasses, the sky is reflected. . . . When I was young I used to hear the songs of Polar journeys; I was lulled in the memory of icebergs, of seas hazy and like milk, of islands where lived birds, which, taking flight in flocks, obscured the sky."

This taste, this artistic instinct, found an outlet and support in the Catholic religion as it was practised in his beloved Brittany. The Southern Catholicism, with its lavish displays, its operatic settings, its blatant gildings, would not have pleased him; nor would the mixture of Catholicism and Humanism, literary, elegant, delighting in pretty Latin verses, faithful to the Jesuit traditions; and when he came across this particular form of religious education, with M. Dupanloup at Saint-Nicholas-du-

Chardouret, he was deeply hurt by it, scandalized, humiliated as a Christian, wounded as an artist, and always felt a kind of resentment on account of it against worldly religion, on the one hand, and on the other against purely literary classical education.

But there is quite another sort of Catholic mind, which is serious to the point of austerity, melancholy to the point of sadness, and in which the deep poetry of the Middle Ages survives. It is that of which our Gothic cathedrals are the stray witnesses and give us a strange sensation in the midst of our modern towns. This sort of Catholicism is more poetic, and gives us a much deeper impression than Ossian and Shakespeare of the poetry characteristic of Northern races; and it is in this Catholicism and its poetic spirit that Renan became steeped to the very soul in the town of his childhood, "an old Episcopal town, rich in poetic impressions, a big monastic city in the Gallic and Irish fashion"; and in its cathedral, bold, adventurous and disturbing as a dream. "The cathedral especially, a very fine fourteenth-century building, with its noble naves, its astonishing architectural audacities, its pretty and extremely slender steeple, its old Roman tower, remaining from a more ancient edifice, seemed made on purpose to induce noble thoughts. In the evening it was left open till very late for the prayers of pious people; lighted by a single lamp, filled with that damp, warm atmosphere which is usual in ancient buildings, the enormous, empty pile was full of infinity and of terrors."

Renan's first and foremost instincts were unlimited dreaming, straying from thought to thought into the profundity of heaven, as if borne upon the waves to the horizon of the Armorican Sea; a taste for contemplation far from the "madding" and vulgar crowd; an infinite desire for something which is limitless, incapable of precise definition, very mysterious and very sweet. These were nourished and strengthened, made to feel at home and at peace in the atmosphere of his native town: "These temples gave me pleasure; I had not studied thy divine art; I used to find God there. Hymns which I can still remember were sung there: 'Hail, star of the sea; queen of those who grieve . . . mystic rose, ivory tower, morning star!' Indeed, O goddess, when I think upon these songs my heart melts. Do thou forgive

me this stupidity ; thou canst not imagine the charm that barbaric magicians put into those verses and how painful it is to me to follow bare reason."

Such was Renan the Catholic. His Catholicism, apart from the faith which he learned and inherited, consisted of a profound spiritualism, a need to belong to something other than the human crowd, an artistic sense inclining to a melancholy and solemn beauty. And we shall see perhaps that, except the faith which was learned and inherited by him, all these qualities remained with him even when he added many others.

II

Faith died away when he analysed it, when he applied not only his sensibility but his intellect to its considerations. Christianity is based on knowledge of the human heart, on the doctoring of the ailments of the soul which knowledge of the human heart has revealed to it, and on the rules and precepts of inner and external, personal and social, conduct which it has given to the world ; this is its moral foundation, very profound and of an almost unshakable and probably indestructible solidity.

On the other hand, it is based on the providential idea, on the idea that God, Who is good, interests Himself in humanity, intervenes in its life by acts of grace and favour, which are breaches of nature's universal law, and has especially intervened in person by the first and second revelations ; and this is the properly theological foundation of Christianity.

Thirdly, it is based on its own sequence, on the fact that, throughout human memory, it has been announced by prophecies, verified by their fulfilment, manifested by the coming of Christ and His life on earth, verified by the authenticity and the concordance of the stories to Christ's coming ; and this is the historical foundation of Christianity ; it is Christianity presented as a series of facts which are proved, which are in agreement and, consequently, which form a system acceptable to reason.

The studies which Renan made at the seminary led him to

question the legitimacy of this last foundation; his later studies caused him to reject the second; but of the first he never had any doubts.

The exegesis, to which he applied himself with all the ardour and mental fidelity of which he was capable, resulted in his believing that, clearly, Christianity was not founded in fact. To him this authenticity and concordance of evidence, which were set forth in the Scriptures, seemed artificial and forced. In the first place he found it contained only probabilities, which are not enough for affirmation; then even these probabilities did not seem strong enough to him. He reached the conclusion that Christianity is not proved by history and that it ought not to try to prove itself thus. This was not enough to prevent him from remaining a Christian, but it prevented him from being a priest. For the Catholic priest must prove Catholicism by its morality, its theology and its history, and the historical demonstration is part of the Catholic dogma. In despair, courageously, Renan renounced holy orders. He was still undoubtedly a Christian, in the rather wide sense of the word, even much more so than are many men who firmly believe themselves Christians.

But his intellectual eagerness, and the very turn of mind which his theological studies had induced in him, sent him off into reading and meditating on philosophies. He found there fairly quickly (and probably at once) a principle which struck him by its apparent truth, and which had from the first, and always retained for him, the character of a piece of evidence. It is the great rationalist principle that "God does not act in the world with particular intentions."

This idea, evolved by a Christian, Malebranche, is not proved, and also expresses an anti-Christian sentiment which cannot admit any religion, and is, in plain language, atheism itself.

It is not proved, for it is of a too general nature. I do not intend to deny the fact that no one has ever seen an act accomplished contrary to nature's laws and, consequently, by the agency of a free and powerful being, having particular intentions; nor that a fact contrary to nature's laws has never been produced before a scientific academy, as Renan loved to point out: but I do believe that we are not in a position to know that

a fact contrary to nature's laws has *never*—and think of the meaning of that word *never*—been produced; and it is the last thing in dogmatism to say so. Of course, such an assertion is true when our knowledge of the world's history is reduced to the rather uncertain and not very detailed knowledge of three or four hundred years, and when, as Renan himself very cleverly put it, "what is called history is the history of the last hour, as though to understand the history of France we were reduced to the understanding of the events of the last ten years." And also, of course, it is true when, moreover, all our knowledge of "nature's invariable laws" is just as limited and just as impalpable as all our knowledge of the world's history. This principle, which is, by the way, very satisfying to the reason, is none the less a pure assertion, like all ideas so general that they go beyond the limits of human control.

Further, it must be observed, as I have said, that it does not admit of any religion, even of a natural character, and leads to pure atheism, a fact which Malebranche did not observe, but of which Renan was very well aware in the end. If God never acts with particular intentions, that is not to say that He does not exist; but for us it is as good as saying so. He becomes confounded with these invariable laws of nature wherein He is imprisoned; He is nothing more than they; He is the law of laws, the supreme law and nothing more than a law. The living God ceases to exist. And men have always adored only a living God, a providential God, a God who listens to prayer, a God from whom things may be asked, a God, consequently, capable of action with particular intentions. All religion is just confidence in a being who is not enslaved by nature, and who can do something for us. And, certainly, we know quite well that this God is a pagan god and that, so long as he is not deprived of gracious omnipotence like unto human caprice, He will have something of the character of the ancient fetish; certainly, so long as there is prayer and hope, there will be no complete release from paganism; but it must also be recognized that, on this account, the only complete escape from paganism is by way of atheism, pure and simple, or at least a practical atheism which, without denying God, ignores Him, and, by dint of separating

Him from the soul's preoccupations, ceases to think about Him.

Therefore, at bottom, unless one accounts for it, as Malebranche did, by drawing distinctions between God the Father and God the Son, if it is accepted fully, sincerely and unconditionally, this affirmation that God does not act with particular intentions is the sign that one has lost faith. One could not express such an opinion if one still believed; because one does not believe in God without visualizing Him, and one does not visualize Him without seeing Him more or less as a living being, as a being whose actions are somehow analogous to one's own behaviour, as a being who is like oneself. The weakness of our conception is not the measure of our belief, but it is its mark. If our conception of God is rather poor, it is because we *imagine* Him with our feeble imagination; but if we have no conception of Him at all, that is proof that we have ceased to think about Him. The negation of the providential God can be regarded as the extreme limit at which the conviction of Deism ceases and as the sign that God has withdrawn from the soul. "You would not seek Me if you had not already found Me," said God to Pascal: "you would only see Me acting if you thought about Me," God would say to the man who no longer believes.

Anyhow, this is the limit which Renan reached, and this time decidedly he was no longer a Christian. But we shall see that he managed to transport anything particularly beautiful and precious which he found in Christianity, all the sentiments which Christianity had brought out or developed in him, into another cult.

It was in 1848, at the time when he was writing *The Future of Science*, which was only published forty years later. He was saturated with German philosophy, German science and French "Liberalism." Fichte was teaching him the cult of science; Herder, historical philosophy; Hegel, the theory of "becoming" and of eternal transformation; French Liberalism, an abounding confidence in the promises of the future. He assimilated all this, but gave to it a particular tone by imbuing it, so to speak, with most of the sentiments which he had applied up to that time to his religion, and which were unattached at the moment. Science

became for him what faith had been till then. He embraced it fervently, in absolute confidence and with boundless hope. It was his new divinity.

These expressions are not metaphors. The terms in which he describes it at this period are those of a believer so enthusiastic that he is jealous and imperious of it. He despises the science which is merely useful; he challenges this God who gives us the great secret to be the revealer *as the other was*; he tells him that he is nothing unless he is all; he enjoins him to attain to and to reveal the infinite. "*The only value of science is in so far as it can replace religion.* . . . I only know a single outcome of science, which is, to resolve the enigma, to explain definitively the meaning of things to Man, to give him the symbol that religions gave him ready-made, and which he can no longer accept. . . . The only value of science is in so far as it can investigate what the revelation pretends to teach. If you take away from it what gives it value, only a dull residue remains. I congratulate the good souls who can be content with it. For my part, as soon as a doctrine obstructs the horizon for me, I declare it to be false; I want to look only into the infinity of space." This gives us a picture, again, of the man of final solutions and absolute truths, the man who will not tolerate the unknowable and will not admit a doctrine which gives only partial explanations, the man who wants and exacts the complete solution. Only, before he found these things in religion, now he expects them of science. The man is still the same, but his orientation has changed. He is merely a Levite at another altar.

Also, if you listen, you will hear him praying still. His lips formulate a hymn to the new idol: ". . . If I saw a more beautiful form of life than science, I would hasten to it. . . . O truth, sincerity in living! O holy poetry of things! with what should one console oneself for not being conscious of thee? Living is not playing with the world to find one's pleasures there; it is the accomplishment of many beautiful things, journeying in company with the stars, knowing, hoping, loving, admiring, doing well. He has lived the most who, with his mind and heart and in his doings, has most adored."

And so the *volte-face* came about. All that Renan had hoped

for from religion he is going to hope for from science; all the homage that he rendered to the one he is going to present to the other; all the functions that he attributed to the one he will vest in the other. Science will organize humanity scientifically, as religion tried to organize it theocratically; "the scientific organization of humanity, such is the ultimate desire of modern science and its bold but legitimate claim."

Reason must govern the world. What should be its claim, if not to this? By what would those choose to be governed who resist it? Reason that did not want to be humanity's director would confess that there is something higher than it, which brings us back to religion. A humanity that would not agree to be governed by reason would, in so doing, invoke a religion by which it would let itself be led. There is the choice between these two, but no compromise. Or rather, there is neither choice nor compromise. Religion's work is over; now reason must do the same thing in another way: it must be invested with the same authority which was lately possessed by religion. In other words, Renan remained a preacher; his "claims," exigencies, sentiments and tone are always the same; it is only his divinity that has altered.

He still dreams of the ideal society of his former dreams, and the only difference is that, although the ideal remains the same, its attainment is in the hands of scholars and not of the priests. He now invokes an order of scholars: "The temples of this doctrine are schools, where men gather together to partake of hypersensitive nourishment together. The priests are philosophers, scholars, artists, poets—that is to say, men who have taken the ideal as a part of their heritage and have renounced the earthly part." This clergy must function simultaneously as Church and Government; it must teach and command; it must guide and administer; it must be both the light and the law. "The ideal Government would be a scientific Government, in which competent specialists would deal with governmental questions as scientific questions, and would try to find their solution rationally. Up to the present it has been birth, intrigue or inherited privilege which have generally determined the rank of the governing classes. I am of opinion that one day . . .

government will become the natural lot of competent men, of a kind of academy of moral and political sciences."

It was the conception of a "new spiritual power," so dear, not only to Saint-Simon, but to nearly all the thinkers from 1825 to 1848, who were followers of Renan and who really did not find it very difficult to follow him; for he brought his conception, as it were, ready-made from his old church to his new. For him, God's priests and science's priests were always "servants of the ideal," who, by their dignity, their moral superiority, their disdain of vulgar things and, to some extent, also of common men, which amounted to a vocation with them, were designed for the government of the world.

And Renan did not even make the distinction, which others set up or to which they resigned themselves, between temporal and spiritual power: he intentionally mixed them both up and collected them under the same heads. As a priest turned scholar he organized or sketched out a *scientific theocracy*. The Revolution seemed to him like the transmission of authority from a religious government to the government of reason.

It cannot be denied that, in his manuscript on *The Future of Science*, in which Renan set out in 1848 all his dreams, all his projects and all his ideas on the organization of the new world, there are many reservations and many half-recantations. After he had left the religious faith Renan never expressed an uncompromising dogmatism. He already admitted that perhaps faith in unending progress through reason is a decoy, that perhaps prejudices are necessary, that it even seems that they alone have the real strength to lead or propel the masses, that reason seems to enlighten without encouraging and inspiring, without supplying the power for action; that if this were true "the legitimate development of humanity" would end up by being its degradation; that it would be condemned to seek truth in obedience to its own law of rational progress, and, having found it, to languish, *quærens lucem, ingemens reperta*; that thus it "would be involved in a deadlock," in which to persevere is useless, and which it was even useless to have entered.

But such reflections were only fleeting in his mind, and his rationalist optimism immediately got the better of them. His

reply was that, at bottom, of course, this doctrine is not sure of itself and cannot prove that it is the best founded; it has something of "the merit," or rather the character, "of the faith which believes without having seen"; the optimism contained in it is like an "entirely gratuitous benevolence made by God"; but what of all this? "If I were to see the foundations give way under humanity, and men butchering each other in a fatal night, I would still proclaim that human nature is upright and made for perfection, that misunderstandings will be cleared away, and that one day the reign of reason and of perfection will be established."

Such was Renan's mind at this period. He was a pious scholar, almost a mystic scholar. He transferred all the religious virtues into the temple of science, and attributed to science all the qualities of a religion; he looked upon science as a moralizing and directing force, a certainty, an infallibility; and he was the passionate and impetuous, almost intolerant and ecstatic, minister of science as he had wanted to be of God.

III

But what was this science which he preached? Science as a whole, ranging from natural history to Man's history, and from Man's history to metaphysics. But, if it is necessary to particularize, the science which Renan will adopt will be the knowledge of Man through history, the science of the successive developments of the human mind studied in the light of all historical discoveries and of all new historical methods. No doubt this is not the whole of science; but it is its centre. If science must be, or must become, a religion, it must be for Man above everything else a revelation of his destinies. Since divine revelation had been ruled out, the only thing left is for humanity to be revealed to itself through knowledge of itself, by progressing from knowledge of what it was to knowledge of what it ought to be. The scholar must be, above all, a historian, a *philologist* (in the widest sense of the word—that is to say, an expert in understanding the human mind in the light of the most remote and the most recent monuments and evidences), and science

must have an historical and philological basis which will know no limits.

Here is a profound view, and one which explains men's quite modern passion for general history. History among the ancients is national in character, and its only aim is to build up and strengthen the city by recalling the exploits of ancestors; history among the moderns is general and, as far as possible, universal, especially since the decline in faith, because, when they believe, men only need their faith to know their aim, but when faith is lacking they need to seek an indication of their aim in the course already followed. So Renan will be the priest of science by being the historian of the human mind, and he will study the history of the human mind, especially in the great religious changes which have come about in humanity. This will be his particular task.

However, he finds it hard to renounce entirely all metaphysical speculation. He knows quite well that, logically, he ought to forbid himself investigations of this sort; the new point of view which he has adopted prohibits them. If the answer to the great problem is in the complete understanding of history, so long as this knowledge is fragmentary, metaphysics is not affected and ought not to be tried. Religion is a complete metaphysics precisely because it is an integral revelation given by him who knows all; it is metaphysics because it is not human. But, before deducing a metaphysics from knowledge of himself and his surroundings, Man must wait until he knows everything about himself, and even everything about everything. Metaphysics is postponed until the definitive and even superhuman development of humanity.

Renan has not the courage to hand over to such remote successors the elaboration of metaphysics. Just because he has religious habits of mind he cannot make up his mind to be in no way a metaphysician. After all, if metaphysics must actually crown all sciences when they are made, it is possible to build, on sciences such as they are, a provisional metaphysics which will be followed by others later on. Only they will not have to be believed as ultimate; they will have to be considered only as stepping-stones, and, in a word, they must be constituted without belief in themselves and must exist without believing in their

existence. So Renan will be a metaphysician and a historian, a historian firmly believing in history, but a metaphysician with no belief in metaphysics. He has set himself two tasks: one very serious, which will consist in knowing how the human mind has managed to evolve from antiquity to the modern world and to bring about so profound a revolution in itself—*The Origins of Christianity*; the other, very brilliant, which will appear from time to time, and to which some hours of meditation will occasionally be devoted, consisting in speculations on general philosophy.

Thus Renan ordered his life about 1850; and he did not swerve from his programme for the rest of his life. Under this régime his thought grew in size and flexibility. The study of small facts counterbalanced by a persistent taste for general ideas, the elaboration of general ideas backed by the minute investigations of a scholar, is an excellent mental discipline. Within this intellect, constantly stirred and exercised and aerated in this way, there was formed a harmony, if not a system, of general ideas which contained all Renan's original conceptions and sentiments and found room for new ideas and new ways of feeling.

This philosophy, intentionally rather fluctuating but permanent in the sense that Renan always comes back to it, sometimes in the most roundabout way, sets out with the idea of progress and terminates with the moral perfecting of Man. Progress exists; it exists everywhere, in the world's material history, in the history of humanity and in the personal history of each one of us. The essence of this progress is an effort to exist in an increasingly organized and harmonious way. What men call creation is a flight, an impulse, a *nisus* of matter in its desire to emerge from chaos and to enter into a eurhythmic state. Goethe said the same thing in very profound words in the first *Faust*: "In the beginning was the Word . . . No. Let us scratch that out. In the beginning . . . *in the beginning was action.*" All coming into existence is the same thing, a forward movement towards the light, a thirst after the daylight. Any origin of species is, again, the same thing, an effort to exist in a stronger, more organized, more complete way. Out of these manifold and accumulated efforts is formed the hierarchy of beings who fill

the world. Universal life is an upward progress. It proceeds from the mineral where it sleeps, to the plant where it slumbers, to the animal where it throbs, to Man, where at last it becomes conscious of itself. Then it becomes moral—that is to say that, since it is conscious of itself, it seeks to become more so, not, as formerly, by a blind movement, but by a combination of reflections, comparisons, memories and precise aspirations. In this sense Man is consciousness of mankind and of the universe. On the one hand, he is the determining point at which the universe becomes conscious of itself; on the other hand, he is the only being who meditates on himself and the world. Man is the soul of the universe; he is the limit at which the universal *nisus* comes upon the knowledge that it exists and begins to account for itself. To be conscious is, therefore, the noblest dignity that exists and the one which creates our duties for us; our duties are our obligations towards the world's soul, which we bear within us.

It would seem as though we suggested above that this universal *nisus* ceases with Man, but this is not at all the case; for the capacity for existence increases indefinitely. Universal progress is continued in Man in proportion as Man is more himself, in proportion as his consciousness of himself and of the world increases—that is to say, in proportion to the increase in his learning and purity. He must understand the world and grasp it more fully to increase his learning; and, by relinquishing the sensual world, render himself more capable of knowledge and consciousness, to increase his purity. Man, considered in isolation, is, therefore, an agent of progress, not only for himself and for humanity, but for the universe, when he understands the world better and has increased his capacity for understanding it. Humanity, considered as a whole, has, therefore, the trust of the world, and it carries the world within itself, since it is within humanity that the world has consciousness of itself; and, by its progress, humanity causes the world to progress, carrying it on ahead by its better understanding of it. Humanity's progress is the progress of the universe.

And thus it will be seen that in this doctrine Renan's original and new ideas are united and merged into each other. He was a devotee of religion and a devotee of science, and now he sings

the praises simultaneously of the scholar and the ascetic. The scholar will be truly learned only if he is pure; there will be no merits in the ascetic's asceticism unless he manages to increase his understanding and his knowledge of the universe. Not only "is knowledge without consciousness the ruin of the soul," as Rabelais said, but there is no such thing as knowledge without consciousness, and consciousness without knowledge fails to attain the end, which is to make the universe live in us; so both knowledge without consciousness and consciousness without knowledge are the ruin of the soul and of the universe. The true scholar is also an ascetic, the true ascetic is also a scholar. Therefore, if not religion, at least what was for Renan the essence of religion, enters into his general conception of things. It certainly gave him pleasure to realize that, when he abandoned religion for science, he did not really abandon anything; and that, basically, religion and science are the same things: both attempts to encompass the Infinite, or at least to get into touch with it and to sacrifice to it everything else, those empty appearances in which "those who are of the world" take delight. This realization gives back to the priest, or to the man born to be a priest, all his security, all his balance, and all his pride perhaps. Anyhow, Renan breathes more freely in a wider conception where ideas, which he had believed to be incompatible with each other, are, or at least seem to be, reconciled and move round together.

But, Renan seems to be no longer a deist; what of his idea of God? God's exclusive realm is a world governed by progress —that is to say, by an obscure consciousness which achieves its minimum of obscurity in Man. The God of this world will be the being in whom this world becomes conscious of itself, and Renan's God will be Man, and more particularly the scholar, as the sage was the true God of the Stoics. This seems to be, roughly, his idea, as we shall see, and it may seem that, in his matured conception, his original ideas had undergone a change. But Renan would probably say that God, a little changed, somewhat metamorphosed and, as it were, refined, is going to reappear in the world, as Renan henceforth understands and describes him.

In the end, what have men meant by God, ever since they have

adored a single supernatural being? First of all, the cause and the creator of all; then the morally perfect being who possesses, in amplified form, and in their ultimate stage of purity and beauty, all the virtues, properties and honourable moral qualities which men find in themselves. Now, in the system set out above, the cause of all is not a cause exterior to the world, a being who gives once for all a "fillip" to the world, as Descartes said. This quite mechanical conception of the universe is not ours here. The cause of all is this inner force, this secret spring, which "sends forth possibility into existence," and which impels every existing thing to increase and fulfil its existence; it is this universal *nisus* which, with the two factors of time and progressive tendency, has made organized worlds out of the cosmic matter, then living beings, then thinking beings, beings whose capacity for thinking of the universe increases in breadth and comprehensiveness. To this cause men have given the name of God. Only it should be observed that it is not external to the world, but inherent in it, and, above all, that it does not remain stationary at the beginning of time; but that it progresses with time, is developed, extended, organized and refined with what it develops, extends, organizes and refines. It is in time and in progress, or rather it is time and progress themselves, or rather, since time and progress are the same thing under different aspects—for there would be no progress without time, and without progress time would not appear to exist, since there would be nothing by which it could be measured and it would not exist in the true sense—this cause is progress, continued indefinitely and being indefinitely continued. God is progressive; He seeks Himself, strives, finds Himself, realizes Himself, and continually strives to become more conscious of Himself and to attain to a fuller realization of Himself; his efforts never cease, for He has Infinity to exhaust in His indefinite metamorphoses and in this eternal upward progress.

In this way are explained both the "continuous creation" of certain ancient Christian doctors and that curious expression of certain German philosophers that "God does not exist, but that He becomes." The *fieri*, the God who is continually becoming, is continuous creation; only, perhaps, we understand better that

continuous creation is progressive creation ; it is not only God's ceaseless action in the world for its existence, but His ceaseless action in the world for its progress. According to this conception, creation, although it exists at every moment in the world's life, comes rather at the end of things than at their beginning, since it will be complete and ultimate only in the future. The world progresses towards creation. God is proceeding towards the realization of Himself. He is a cause especially in the sense of an ultimate cause, and He is continually created by His aspiration towards existence. This is the basis of men's traditional ideas on the Creator and creation.

Thus everybody is right (a thing which is, and will be more and more, one of Renan's intellectual pleasures). He who says that God exists, says truly : for He is in the act of formation ; and he who says that there is no God is right : for He has not yet reached His ultimate self-realization. He who says that the existence of evil on earth proves the non-existence of God speaks the truth : for the sign of true creation and the birth of God will be the elimination of evil. He who says that the existence of evil on earth is no evidence of the non-existence of God is right : since God is formed precisely by the progressive destruction of the impure. And in this way all questions about anything under the sun can be answered. Renan found one of those broad and fluctuating theories which gave pleasure to his intellect, because it could move freely in it, and to his intellectual hospitality, because he could welcome all opinions in it.

But, by the word God, men meant not only the cause of the world, but also the perfect being. They were right, and much more right in Renan's conception than in their own. For in their own—the traditional—conception God as a perfect being is in the beginning, and from Him are evolved and brought into existence imperfect things and beings at least half bad. The world is a degradation of God. This offends against piety and astounds reason. But, consider the matter the other way round. The world begins ; matter is organized ; God strives to exist ; matter proceeds with more complicated and delicate organizations ; suns shine forth ; planets are boiling hot and then cooled down ; God exists ; life appears ; God's existence is increasing ; Man is born,

the obscure conscience of the universe is given definite form in a being who understands it; God is growing bigger; Man progresses; God progresses with him. When will God be the perfect being? When we are ourselves perfect. We said above that Man is the trustee of the world; now we can say, what we implied above, that Man has trust of God.

In other words, Man is God! This is true in the sense that, while He exists in all things, God is stronger in Man, since Man alone is conscious of the existence of God in himself; but it is not true in the sense that, since everything is God, God exists in everything and not in some things to the exclusion of others: but what must be realized is that this tremendous striving towards perfection, which is God Himself, finds its conscious, luminous and definitively, because intentionally, progressive expression only in Man. The formation of God is brought about by Man on earth, and on other planets by beings conscious of themselves and having understanding of the universe—if such exist. They form Him and "organize" Him by thinking about Him; they create Him and cause Him to proceed towards creation. They are "the children of God." The expression is correct—that is to say that they are, as it were, His flesh; they are, more than anything else in the enormous universe, of the stuff that He is made of. They say "Thy kingdom come," which is a very apposite remark, meaning: "Let us rush, hurry, bring, force into being the coming of God." The world's aim is the reign of reason: in other words, the world's aim is that God shall exist. This is the work to which humanity applies, and must apply, itself. We are creators of God when we understand Him, and He is our creator in this respect—that He has chosen us to understand Him; and this is true life, eternal life.

"Eternal life" is another very apt expression: it signifies that everything comes to an end except the being who has consciousness of everything—of his progress, of his infinity, of his eternity, of his direction and of his aim. That being shares in Infinity and Eternity. He has something of the eternal and the infinite, because the infinite and the eternal are in his thought. "The eternal part of each man is the intercourse he has had with the Infinite." Men have thus personal communion with eternity

and in common they form, or can form, an intellectual society which is eternal; they communicate in infinity and in the ideal. Nothing is more exact than the idea of the Christian Communion: Man, who thinks on the ideal, the eternal and the infinite, receives God into his heart, embraces Him, as it were, and comprehends Him, mixes Him in his life and is inspired by Him, as by a soul.

And this soul is immortal. The soul's immortality has been understood by Man in a rather vulgar and interested way. It is none the less a truth. Indeed, it is truth itself. In its proper sense it signifies that to understand the Infinite is to share in it; that to conceive the Eternal is to enter into Eternity. The soul is outside of time if it can understand the infinitude of time; it has eluded death, which strikes only things which live merely in and for themselves. Everybody is immortal from the moment that he realizes that he has something that cannot die; for as soon as he realizes it he participates in it; he is associated with this world-soul which has countless transformations, of which he is one, but which existed before the beginning of all things and will continue to exist after their end.

Thus Renan, having eliminated Christianity as a whole from his scientific conception, included it in his philosophic conception by means of metaphors. In this idealist Pantheism—so beautiful, so brilliant, and also so inconsistent—Christianity reappears as a system of ideas, very true fundamentally, which need only explanation and refining to be able to be admitted without the least difficulty.

And not only Christianity but, in truth, all religions are here accepted as fragmentary and elementary forms of the new religion, which consists in the idea of the intimate union of God with the world and of God with Man. They have all expressed or stammered out something of this sort. That is enough; they have truth in them; may they be welcome. This Pantheism is a Pantheon.

In truth, it is by continual and deliberate ambiguities that Renan maintains his point in this high syncretism. Since words have for him three meanings, one which they have in constituted doctrines, another that the crowd gives to them, and the third

which he gives to them himself, he uses them indifferently in one or other of their senses, according to the needs of his demonstration and according to whether he wants to define or reconcile. He will say " the Divine " instead of God when he wants to explain his own theology and his way of conceiving the eternal in the world; and immediately afterwards, in expressing the same idea, he will say God, in order to show that, fundamentally, there is no difference between the deists and himself. God, consciousness and immortality are for him " good, old, solid words," rather vulgar, which must be preserved for the truth which is contained in them and which he preserves especially for moments when he needs to be not absolutely precise. Thus, although he is always very bent on the denial of supernaturalism, and always very insistent on this point that God never acts in the world with particular intentions, he makes very frequent use of the word Providence, which has no other meaning than the designation of a personal God, apart from and avoiding the invariable laws of the world.

Thus there is in Renan a whole terminology with a double or triple meaning, in which he disports himself with perfect equanimity, and moreover, so far, with entirely good faith, but which is very deceptive and very dangerous for the reader's mind, and will ultimately be both deceptive and dangerous for Renan's own mind. So far, as I have said, he acts in very good faith, because he is persuaded that truth is a matter of degree, and that if everything, even in reality, is indefinitely transformed, in thought, everything must be fluctuating and flexible in order to understand and reflect and express the ceaseless evolution of its object. I believe he would say, if necessary, that everything thought of has actually existed, and that everything that has existed has, at least partially, been thought of, so strong is his belief that Man's thought is the only self-expression of the universe, and that the universe exists really only in human thought; from which it follows that there is no such thing as false thought, but there is a set of thoughts which is approaching nearer and nearer to the truth.

There is in this mental attitude a particular kind of scepticism which consists in predicating everything, since everything has

been, is, or will be, true; and, by synthesis, suppressed time in the absolute is real, since it has been, is, or will be. Renan reaches this scepticism gradually, and will be completely enveloped by it, at least in appearance. At the moment he has arrived at a very elevated idealism, pantheistic in nature, which accepts all religious speculations and all the affirmations of consciousness as clumsy and honourable sketches, as childish and valuable likenesses, of this truth, subtle and evasive, that *All* is a great intellect which is formed and organized, and that Man's duty is to contribute, by adherence in the first place, and then by collaboration, to the great and painful mystery of the slow and laborious evolution of perfection out of chaos.

I fear that I have not been able to give sufficient consideration to the thousand details of Renan's thought, which was perhaps the most sinuous and most delicately whimsical that has ever existed; but such was the general tenor of Renan's philosophy from about 1860 to about 1875, the date of the *Philosophical Dialogues* being 1871, and that of the letter to Berthelot, 1863. It will be best to stop at this period to see what was the influence of his general thought upon the political and historical works of Renan at the same time. This second part of his self-appointed task was surely the one to which he consecrated the most time and patient effort. He wrote an entire history of *The Origins of Christianity*, from Jesus to Marcus Aurelius, and, to complete this exposition, the entire history of the Jews, from their origin up to Jesus. This comprised the history of the greatest moral crisis which has ever occurred, so far as we know, to humanity. It was necessary to explain the bankruptcy of antiquity. It was necessary to explain why the human race was not satisfied with the "old nurse," the educator of mankind, with its fascinating, ingenious and profound philosophy, with its vigorous and strengthening moral literature, with its adorable poetry, and also with the general civilization which it had spread around, with the relative but very real and very beneficial peace which it had at last succeeded in bringing to the world. It was necessary to explain how the exalted mysticism of the Jewish prophets took possession so rapidly both of the Jewish people and of the whole Roman world, and much more of the Roman world than

of the Jewish people. It was a miraculous fact, whose strangeness has gone a long way to convince even thoughtful minds of the divinity of the chief actor in this great psychological drama.

This truly psychological and historical problem was not completely resolved by Renan and probably never will be by anybody. At least he exposed the data and various elements of it with a clarity quite certainly unknown before him. Errors in detail are of little importance in this matter. The essential is the psychology of the races, and at this Renan is a past master. Nobody knows better, since he carried out to the farthest possible limit all works of exploration and examination, nobody shows better, since he had wonderful skill in the art of moral analysis, what was a Jew, an Armenian, a Corinthian, an Italian, a Roman of Rome, an African in the first, second or third century after Jesus. Nobody shows better the confused and deep aspirations which jostled in all these heads and all these hearts. The rapid expansion of Christianity is followed step by step, and at each step a new reason (or several, for it is Renan's fine defect that he has too many ideas) is given for the fresh success that it carries off and the fresh progress that it makes.

And, out of all this, one big idea is finally disentangled and established, the idea that Christianity, from its origins in the prophets' teaching to its sacerdotal organization, is, on the one hand, a tremendous awakening of the idea of Justice, and, on the other, a thirsting after holiness and morality, and hence, in these two respects, the long-prepared and long-delayed coming of plebeianism.

The ancient world had not known Justice, but only Right. Right is the rational organization and precisely calculated maintenance of established things, so that they last and are not injured by the caprices of violence; it is a system of guarantees against accidental force; but it is also an organization and consolidation of established and traditional force. Justice does not recognize the right of force; it desires equal rights for the weak and the strong, and that men shall be as brothers, sharing to the same extent in the universal heritage. It is a plebeian idea, which was ignored by the whole of antiquity, which was hurled by the

Hebrew prophets to the four corners of their limited horizon, and whose diffusion was made possible and easy after Jesus, by the facilities for communication in the Roman Empire and the disappearance of aristocracies in the heart of this same Empire; it was an idea of an incalculable importance; for, by dint of pervading minds and establishing itself as a dogma among the human race, it ended up by rousing the human race against Nature, which certainly knows no justice, and against God, Who is undoubtedly responsible for the laws of nature; and, after the foundation of a religion, it finally shook it, undermined it and caused it to fall.

And Christianity was also, judged from the sentimental standpoint, a mystic folly, an ardent thirsting after morality and holiness. The world of antiquity had known morality and virtue in a high degree, since voluntary sacrifice of the individual to something other than himself and his own property was a well-known and frequent thing; but this morality was still utilitarian, since this virtue was civic; it was to the city, to the native land, that the individual sacrificed himself, for them that he was pure, courageous, patient, disinterested, and died. But the idea of holiness in itself, for itself or for love of God—which is the same as saying for love of holiness—is quite another idea and another sentiment. It is an exaltation of human dignity in connexion with the service of God, it is man making himself pure, holy, sacred and heroic for service—that is to say, for the realization of the ideal. Out of this will arise things sometimes very questionable from the social standpoint, always venerable from the point of view of personal effort, and in any case absolutely unknown to antiquity—such as asceticism, monachism, priestly chastity, and chastity in general considered as a virtue, love of poverty, the spirit of sacrifice for the beauty of sacrifice in itself. It is a veritable change in human nature, a change which cannot be so profound as the first Christians imagined (which is not surprising), but of which, however, an immense multitude of men dreamed during three centuries, which was realized by a great number at first, by some later on, and of which, up to the present day, the influence has always been felt on earth. Christ, or His heralds, form the starting-point of the existence of the

cult of the ideal on the globe. It is the greatest innovation that men have ever known.

Three things, so far as they are discernible, led up to it: the rise of plebeianism, the peculiar mentality of the Hebrew prophets, and the wonderful legend of Christ, which, strongly appealing to men's imaginations, served as a universal vehicle for the spirit of the prophets' teaching and caused it gradually to pervade the whole of the ancient world and in time the whole globe.

The central figure in this history of a moral revolution is Jesus. Renan did not, as a matter of fact, depict this figure with the greatest sureness. He was perhaps wrong to begin with it. The last of the prophets ought, perhaps, to have been studied after his forerunners. When Renan came to describe Jesus he knew the Jewish spirit, but he had not sufficiently assimilated it and was not familiar enough with it. Also, without exactly being false to Jesus, he painted Him rather according to the sentiments he had for Him than according to what can be inferred from His acts and to all the probabilities. Very susceptible to the charms of elegant sweetness, of sensitive grace and of refined distinction, deliciously moved by a journey to Galilee, with which was connected the memory of a beloved sister, whose death occurred in the course of it, he somewhat feminized Jesus Christ. He made of Him not only a wise young man, of infinite sweetness and tenderness, with an irresistible smile and enchanting eloquence—which is what Jesus quite probably was at certain moments—but a distinguished philosopher, almost detached from His work, somewhat inclined to melancholy disillusionment and superior irony. He made Jesus a little like Renan. These characteristics are superfluous. They get in Renan's way when he ought to be considering the circumstances in which Jesus appears authoritative and imperious, which He seems to have been, through His goodness, from the earliest moment in His preaching. Jesus evidently had many different aspects, which explains exactly the immense influence He had, and Renan has not fully brought to light all these aspects, nor even the most important and the most decisive of them. In the *Life of Jesus* there is something fanciful, at least about the tone and colour,

which is not observable, or at least is less so, in the other parts of the great history.

Nevertheless, all the rest of this history is not lacking in greatness and majestic beauty, in delicacy and penetration, and a picturesque reality in the detail, which make of it, perhaps, the greatest French work of the nineteenth century. A rather severe historical criticism sometimes regrets that Renan is not sufficiently resigned to ignore. When he has assuredly only a legend under consideration, is he entitled to make history out of it? Would it not be better to say that nothing is known of the history of the Jews up to a certain date than, always in a somewhat arbitrary way, to interpret the legend, to raise it to the dignity of history, or to infer from it a history which always remains hypothetic? Grotius seems to me to have found the right answer to this question, to have excused Renan by excusing himself, and to have exposed, roughly, Renan's procedure as well as his own: " I describe the most ancient times separately, as they were conceived by the faith and sentiment of the original Greeks, and as they are known only by means of their legends, without allowing myself to measure the quantity, great or small, of historical elements which may be contained in these legends. If the reader reproaches me with not having been helpful to him in this appreciation, if he asks why I do not raise the curtain to see the picture, I will repeat the reply made by the painter Zeuxis to the same question, which was put to him when he exhibited his masterpiece of initiative art: 'The picture is in the curtain.' What we read as legend was formerly generally accepted history and the only true history of their past which the ancient Greeks could conceive or experience. Nothing that any art could not infer is hidden behind the curtain."

It must be said that Renan does try a little to " measure the quantity of historical elements contained in legend." Merely in obedience to the instinct and gift for the interpretation and transposition of ideas, which, as we have seen, was very strong with him, he is inclined to interpret and question and manipulate the legends; he sifts them a little; but most often he follows Grotius' procedure, does not suppress legendary history as being unworthy of consideration, is not set upon extracting from

it the element of truth that it may contain, and gives it as evidence of the way in which men of old understood their past and their origins. The fact is that, if for positive history legend is a mere nothing, for the history of ideas, moral history, it has in the end, and in varying degrees, as much importance as established facts. It reveals the most ancient state of mind of a race, it is the psychological document on the childhood of that race, and, consequently, on the formation of its temperament and its soul. It does not teach us what that race was; it teaches us more, by informing us of what it thought it was; it reveals to us its earliest dreams, its earliest general ideas, its earliest conceptions, popular, spontaneous and naïve, of everything, and especially of itself. Legends are peoples' "confessions"; and not confessions that have been arranged and composed in maturity, but that have been transmitted without too appreciable alterations by childhood to youth and by youth to maturity; and, as they were, in the intercourse of even old peoples, a means of getting back to their childhood, they are both an evidence of the primitive state of mind and a sign of the permanent state of mind, of that to which the people in question loved always to return.

There is, therefore, nothing more important to the moral history of nations. Now, it is a moral history that Renan has written, and it is to his honour that, although a few objections to detail could be made, it is a most attractive, moving and living work. Even if the general ideas which spring from it were invented, there would remain a picture, the most animated possible, the most vivid and, I will add, the most dramatic, of the Oriental world, of the Greek and Roman worlds, in the first three centuries of the Christian era. There would remain the wonderful portraits of so many celebrated men who will never fade from memory, portraits of David, Saint Paul, Nero, Marcus Aurelius. It is apparent, when Renan's early works are read, such as *The Future of Science*, that about 1848 he was not less influenced by Michelet than by Fichte, Herder and Hegel. In history-writing Renan very much resembles Michelet. Renan, like Michelet, was inspired by that muse, or magician, by whom history is made to quicken souls, to bring to life human brains and hearts, to have power to make, first of all, the author, then ourselves, to

some extent, live with men of ancient times as with our contemporaries and see them with the same clearness as our near neighbours; and it would seem that, when it took Renan under its protection and rule, this muse was calmed without growing cold and retained its power of evocation while losing its power for casting spells. Renan has as much knowledge and application and imagination as Michelet, but fewer faults; like Michelet, he is an historian-poet, further removed from, and always disliking, romanticism, and a passionate historian-moralist, but passionate only for his art, and, although he has the same quality of penetrating deep into hearts, his procedure is more leisurely, more prudent and without digression. This great glory, which is almost exclusively French, the glory of having written history as moralists, of having been an old race of precise and delicate moralists investing men in history years afterwards with these qualities long since acquired, and thus renewing the historic art and even historical science: Renan carried this as far and as high as it seems possible for it to go.

And, finally, if religious and social history, to which he consecrated at least two-thirds of his life, was useful to all thinking people, it was especially useful for himself. In seeing how a religion, and an almost universal religion, germinates, is born and developed in humanity, his religious sense, which he was later to lose, was strengthened and took a deeper hold on him.

Between *The Future of Science* and the *Philosophical Dialogues* there are twenty-three years of historical study of the gestations of the Christian religion. Science and religion had, first of all, taken up their positions as antagonistic in his mind. He had believed that, if one of them was abandoned, the other must be one's only belief, to which was attached all one's faith and one's hope. When he came to contemplate humanity producing a religion he understood, or rather he understood better, that science and religion are equally strong tendencies, and probably both indestructible, of humanity. His positivism itself, or, if you like, his incapacity to admit the intervention of the supernatural in the world, helped him to understand the profound nature of religions and how far humanity will never do without them. For, it should be observed, it is precisely if religions are human

facts that they are eternal. The believer can fear that religions will disappear, but the " philologist " can hardly imagine that they will do so. Those who believe that religion is a divine fact, born of a revelation, may fear that men will turn aside from it, that God will fail to give them a new revelation, and that there will no longer be religion on earth. He who believes that humanity produces the religion that it needs to nourish its dream and give support to its morality, and who knows that, from the most remote times in the world's known history, humanity has always created religions, seemingly more and more pure, sees in religion, as in science, the product of an eternal need, *an organ created by a need*, a moral limb of humanity, without which humanity would be, as it were, one-legged and lame. For, " it is the indubitable principle that human nature is, as a whole, irreproachable and proceeds towards perfection by successively and variously imperfect forms." This remark, which was made in *The Future of Science*, to claim the rights of Reason and Science, might be made to recognize the right of religions; in its main outlines, in its general and permanent tendencies, humanity makes no mistakes, and religion is one of the general and universal instincts. As a big fact, therefore, religion is its own justification; and Renan understood this in studying it as a fact. If he seemed almost biased in his endeavour to contain the chief religious ideas, in deformed or refined form, in the scheme of his philosophic ideas, it is because not only his hospitable intellect, but also his historical knowledge, inclined him, and almost compelled him, to think religiously as much as scientifically, in order to think humanly and in order to attain to his secret desire of thinking humanity in himself.

The reflection of his religious studies on his political ideas is not less apparent. In truth, the scientific and religious Renans seem to have contributed equal parts to the formation of the political Renan. The scientific Renan knew about sociology that science is always the lot and the privilege of a chosen few, and that political science is " a science like any other." Consequently he would never have been able to approve of Democracy. It always seemed a contradiction to him. If it is admitted that the aim of science is " to organize humanity scientifically, the

government, the permanent organization, the continual organization of a nation, must necessarily be scientific in character." It cannot have such a character in a democratic régime. The only rational government, according to Renan, would be that of a body of special scholars, whose constant study and perpetual employment was the art of governing. The Government would be a political magistracy, as the "Magistracy," properly speaking, is a legal magistracy. Any other form of government can cause only confusion and relinquish the interests of a nation into the hands of chance. The unscientific government is absence of government. It is an anarchy invested with the outward appearance of organization. Government will be scientific or there will be no government.

This is the reasoning that Renan follows as a man of science. The religious Renan is led to a less determined, rather larger, but very similar solution. Certainly all religions, generally speaking, are popular in character, and Christianity was particularly the coming—one of the most perceptible forms and one of the decisive *moments* in the coming—of plebeianism. But religious organization has always been aristocratic. Ancient religious organizations were aristocratic to the last degree; the religious organization of Christianity began by being democratic for some time, but became entirely aristocratic in its turn. The thing is fatal; religious sentiment is a sentiment, but a religion is a patrimony of general ideas. There must be a depository for these general ideas somewhere; it cannot be in the hands of the varied, changing, scattered crowd, which lacks steadiness; it must be in the hands of a constituted, permanent, traditional body, independent of the crowd. Can a civil government be very different? Does it not also have a depository, if not for truths, at least for traditions necessary to the existence of the nation? Is it not also like the living history of a country? A country is governed by its history, which puts it under obligations, weighs it down and impels it in the direction which its history has followed. A government is this very history, in the person of those who know, understand and think it. If it is anything else, it is the element of uncertainty in the procedure set up in principle; it is the alternate interruption and resumption

of history's progress. If we pursued the comparison between a religion and a government we would say that the government which is not aristocratic in character, instead of being "the outcome of religion," is a succession of heresies. All the relics of his religious sense and priestly instinct, therefore, lead Renan to have no other conception of the government of a people, especially of a great people, than an aristocratic one.

And, finally, Renan the philosopher, who was composed partly of the scientific Renan and partly of the religious, is, as we have already seen, eminently aristocratic. We know that for him Man only properly breaks away from his animal origins by his participation in the Infinite, that it is in Man that the universe becomes conscious of itself and begins to become God; but, putting aside general definitions, to how many men do these qualifications and this dignity apply? Only to those who, perhaps by their sentiment, even obscure, but especially by intelligence and knowledge, have this general idea of the universe and are capable of embracing it. At bottom, Renan sees no men worthy of this name but the scholar and the thinker; at bottom, he believes that only absolutely superior men are "immortals," mirrors reflecting the Ideal and beings sharing in Infinity. It does not seem to him either proved or even demonstrable that a Papuan's soul is immortal. Caro said wittily that for Mr Renan Paradise is a palace whose ante-chamber is the Institut Français. With such a conception of humanity Renan could only be profoundly aristocratic; all his instincts tended in that direction, and he was so all his life, even among the meanderings of his capricious thoughts and disconcerting paradoxes. He has not the trenchant aristocracy of Joseph de Maistre; but his is quite as haughty; he tempers it with a smile, but this smile is much too intellectual, although amiable, not to be ironical.

As a matter of fact, Renan found himself out of his element in our society. This is obvious even when he is considering what is given as the amusement, even when his attention is directed to advertisement; he always does so "*cum grano salis*," and, in the *Memories of Childhood and Youth*, even takes good care to take things literally. Do not let us say, crudely, that he would have liked a society where he would have been ruler; but he

would have liked a society where only his equals—but these would have been too few—or only those who were, roughly, capable of understanding him, would have been in constitutional possession of the government. Much humility is needed to say to oneself: "From the moment when I believe I am conversant with politics I cannot reproach anybody else with the pretension of understanding them." Renan was not humble, or at least had not such humility as this. He suffered as the result of the rise to politics and the administration of men so much inferior to him in literature and knowledge. Democracy hurt all his scientific, religious and philosophic ideas, all his general ideas; it offended, too, slightly, the very legitimate esteem in which he held himself. Such being the case it was difficult for him not to be aristocratic. He was so without bitterness, ordinarily, without violence, without passion, without arrogance, in which he was truly aristocratic and knew that, when one is an aristocrat, one must be so in an aristocratic fashion.

IV

The last period of Renan's life, from about 1875 to 1892, saw the complete and, as it were, excessive development of his intellect. More than ever he wanted to understand everything, to contain everything in the brilliant and elastic tissue of his thoughts, and perhaps he took too strong a delight in exercising indefinitely and diversely his intellect, without finding stopping-places, precise solutions and fixed convictions. It seems that, before dying, he wanted to have, or had, by a natural transformation of his brain, almost simultaneously, all conditions of the mind.

He had known the state of a religious soul, the state of a scientific soul, a state of soul in which science and religion existed together without excluding each other; he knew the state of an optimistic soul, and of a pessimistic soul, haughty irony and unlimited indulgence, resignation and sarcasm, religious uplifting and Voltairean banter, to a certain extent all the ways of thought and even of belief, expressing each in so lively a fashion as to make it seem each time the only one that he understood and practised. His supporters—and almost everybody was at that time in his favour, so great was the charm he exercised

upon the world—called this "dilettantism"—that is to say, artistic whimsicalities in ideas; the critics saw in it a hint of charlatanism and the desire all the time to surprise the public with a new illusion. Especially it was Renan's real nature which was revealed in its entirety—namely, the endless need to understand and always to understand, to exercise his mind more and more and enlarge it as he exercised it.

He had, moreover, announced this last transformation of his genius to the public. He had said in his *Philosophical Dialogues*: "I will herewith set out the pacific dialogues to which the various lobes of my brain are accustomed to devote themselves, when I leave them quite free to ramble. . . . *Formerly each had a system in which it lived and died: now, we travel successively through all the systems, or, better still, we understand them all simultaneously.*" He did not expose every system in the last years of his life, but he allowed the spirit and, as it were, the essence of all the systems to escape from his mind, in which they were all contained. One day it was the death of the ideal that he bewailed as the death of Adonis or Daphnis in *The Water of Youth*; another day he preached reconcilement to the rather coarse and vulgar modern positivism, with an apparently sufficient resignation, in *Caliban*. And he bursts forth into a bitter pessimism, cursing the incorrigible absurdity and incurable ferocity of humanity in *The Priest of Nemi*, Renan's real *Candide*, certainly more bitter than that of Voltaire, because in it he seems to probe the very sources, gloomy and profound, of eternal human folly; and, beside that, the penetrative Voltaire of *Candide* seems superficial. Another day Renan gave himself the pleasure of calling young men, "the town's young flower," to the joy of living and smiling at life, and made honourable amends for his former slight denunciation of Béranger.

All this can be expressed briefly: *he took pleas ure incontradictions*. Contradictions, half-truths which are contradictory, contradictory fragments of a complete truth, are a torment to the reason which wants to resolve them, and the divine amusement of the intellect which examines them without claiming to reconcile them. It was the great pleasure and, as it were, intellectual delight of Renan.

One theory among others, new at the time and propagated in the world by Schopenhauer, delighted him because it contained a big and absolutely irreducible contradiction : it was that of the unconscious sacrifice of the individual to the species. Why does the individual act against his interests, and even regardless of them, when those of the species are in question? Why does egoism, so natural, give way and disappear in the individual at the precise moment when it is to the species' interest that it should disappear? Abnegation, which can be taught to men with so much difficulty for the service of the State, is a thing, if not universal, at least infinitely widespread, for the service of the species. It seems that there is a genius of the species which says to each of us : " Die, so that the race may survive " ; and which attaches to this heroism such pleasure, or such an illusion of pleasure, such an outburst of passion, that hardly anybody can resist it. It seems that Nature blinds us at the exact moment when she needs us. It seems that there is somewhere a great deceiver who dupes us to make us act as blind instruments for ends which are beyond us. This theory, already set out in *Philosophical Dialogues*, somehow infatuated Renan, and he came back to it time and again, because it is a nice example of how impossible it is for the human intellect to explain rationally the thing which has the closest connexion with us, human life itself.

And what can it explain anyhow? Do we not meet with this delicate and subtle deception everywhere? Are not virtue and morality bad bargains, in which we are duped, and by which we take delight and put our honour in being duped? He who is virtuous is right; for, although it is wrong and stupid, nevertheless the greatest human joys are to be found in this sort of self-deception and this kind of stupidity. He who is vicious can also perhaps justify himself; for there is nothing to show that nature punishes the vicious more than the ascetic, nor that society has ever had serious preferences for the virtuous nor true severity on the corrupt. It is astonishing how everything is true; how, the more it is examined, everything can not only be defended—this is the sophist's business—but has its profound reasons, a fact which gives food for thought and hesitation to the philosopher. Science is certainly a fine thing : however, is

it not curious that the completest ignorance leads any Parisian urchin naturally and by the easiest road to have precisely the philosophic opinions of M. Littré or M. Renan? It is quite possible that everything is vain because everything is uncertain.

Thus Renan made his way, somewhat intoxicated with paradoxes, somewhat aroused by irony, and quite certainly making fun of us: but also ridiculing himself a little—that is to say, enjoying the supreme delight of an intellect which contradicts itself in the moment of speaking, refutes itself at the moment of proving, confounds itself at the moment of pride in itself, which actually only serves to make it prouder; which passes abruptly from one side to another of the question under review to revel in its promptitude and skill. The intellect's supreme pleasure is ubiquity, and right from the beginning this was the state towards which Renan's intellect was directed. It might be asked whether, frankly speaking, Renan did not reach a state of pure scepticism by reason of having so many ideas. It must be explained that, towards the end of his life, Renan had practically all known forms of scepticism, but had not the sceptical background.

He had an intellectual scepticism, which consisted in the belief that truth is "so subtle a point," as Pascal said, that our clumsy instruments cannot reach it, that it is elusive and evasive of our grasp, that it is in shades, and shades as changing as "the dove's neck," and that, consequently, a way of not missing it, perhaps, is to multiply points of view, conceptions and even contradictions. When one has contradicted oneself many times there is at least the chance that one has hit upon the truth once. Renan had always had, to some extent, this sort of scepticism after he lost faith, and there are traces of it already in his earliest writings: but he "became conscious of himself," as it were, at the moments of decline, or rather of appeasement.

He had a scepticism of modesty. Nothing repelled Renan more than to seem too sure that he was right. The intemperate dogmatism of the early seventeenth-century French philosophers seemed to him a form of pedantry, and he had literally a horror of all pedantry. He was comfortable and had the approval of his thinker's conscience only when he had added to his

observations, his exposures, his most serious and most considered lessons, a: "Moreover, I am not sure about it." In truth, there is such a pride in conviction, when one is without faith, that affirmation is a real suffering to the reasonable man. Renan suffered in this way, and almost acutely. He would not only have said with Montaigne, "It is placing a very high price on one's conjectures to cook a man alive for them," but also, "It is placing a very high price on one's conjectures to claim to impose them, if only by assurance of tone and decision of movement. Who am I to believe myself assured by what reason assures me?" In this he remained in the Christian spirit, as happened to him in so many things. He remained relatively humble; he still said, in his own way: "My substance is as nothing before you." As a fact, the Christian who loses his faith and not his head, who remains humble or does not become too proud, will never be too dogmatic; he gets in the habit of humiliating his reason; he will not humiliate it before a dogma, but he will still humiliate it before the mystery. Now the mystery is everywhere, all around the so limited circle of pale light which is cast at a little distance from us by the little lantern with which we are furnished. The ancient Christian who did not want to affirm religion because he found it badly proven will find few things sufficiently proven to be affirmed with sureness. There were already in *The Future of Science* some signs, if not yet of this modesty, at least already of this intellectual bashfulness. After 1850 this reserve is continual in Renan: it is part of his temperament as an "upright man."

He had also a scepticism of timidity, I mean of any sort of civil timidity; for his thought is bold, as we know; but he had timidity in his character and in his relations with men. He never wanted to seem too convinced, because conviction has always something rather naïve in it and capable of giving rise to mockery. This sentiment, which is bad, was quite weak in Renan; but it did exist and must be taken into account. Observe, right at the beginning, almost on the first page of *The Future of Science*, the very significant oratorical precautions that Renan takes against possible raillery. He has just affirmed the superiority of the soul's life over lower life, over the life of interests and pleasures.

He puts himself on his guard at once, seemingly very quickly alarmed: " I know that, by setting out with such weighty truths, I have taken my licence as a Bœotian. But on this point I have no shame. For a long time I have placed myself among the simple and heavy minds who take things religiously." In truth, he shows how frightened he is of being called a Bœotian by getting in so well beforehand, and hastening to claim this title for himself so that nobody can give it to him. In this there is a certain timidity which will contribute later to giving to Renan airs of detachment and irony against himself, sometimes rather uncivil in their insistence. His little affectations and appearances of " altitude " in this respect arise from this slight fear of ridicule. The superior air, a hint or a trifle of that " haughty pedantry " with which Malebranche reproached Montaigne, was not lacking in Renan towards the end of his career.

And also, perhaps, he had a scepticism of politeness. He was always polite, incapable of falling out with the human race and even with an adversary, of very studied and almost cunning good breeding, in the ecclesiastical manner. His manners are difficult to reconcile with very determined and decisive assertion. A fairly violent assertion is almost a challenge. As it is not very civil to be sure of oneself, so it is not very civil to be sure of something, because, apart from faith, to be sure of something is precisely to be sure of oneself. Renan liked, therefore, not to make assertions because he did not like to contradict. To assert is to contradict beforehand. On the contrary, Renan makes his excuses in advance. His sceptical remarks were little honourable amends made beforehand to whomsoever was not of his opinion. He seemed to say: " If these opinions are unfortunate enough not to be yours, believe me to be so sorry about it that I would like to believe them false; and, indeed, as a matter of fact, I do believe them to be at least very debatable."

This type of politeness—since, by its very definition, politeness is a half-lie—is always accompanied by a certain irony, and Renan's irony was, at the same time, a form and a secret revenge of his politeness. He ridiculed his reader slightly, while respecting him intelligently and acting towards him in ingeniously condescending ways. These attitudes of captious courtesy have

unexpected results and sometimes produce indirect effects. By thinking so little of one's own ideas, one demonstrates to fairly informed men how far one is ready to think little of their ideas. If a man is so detached in respect of his own ideas, imagine how easy it certainly is for him to be detached from other people's ideas; and if he is so modest with regard to himself, think how likely it is that he will be so with regard to other people. A great secret disdain, a lot of veiled mockery, and a lot of equivocal teasing were contained in the good manners of this "eutrapelic" scepticism of good company.

And thus Renan became imperceptibly a mystifier. He was not averse to giving to his old formulæ a smart and enigmatic turn in order to have the refined pleasure of not being understood. He had said formerly, for example, that God is an eternal becoming; later he said: "God does not exist: but He will perhaps exist one day." There is only a slight difference; but all the same the first expression is that of a philosopher, and the second that of a rather too humorous man, who likes to surprise more than to instruct. Admittedly he had moments of agreeable perversity. He rather liked to scandalize. He used to ask such questions as: Who knows if beauty is not as good as virtue, since both are manifestations of the Ideal? Who knows if vice is so sinful? Each has his own way of realizing the portion of the Ideal which he has in him, and the total of all these partial realizations is, no doubt, a harmonious whole. If vice and stupidity did not exist, probably a note in the great concert would be missing, and undoubtedly something would be missing from the great festival of the universe." These caprices pleased him when they were taken for what they were, and particularly when they were not understood. The festival of Renan's mind would also not have been complete without the inclusion of one or two notes of Mephistophelism. But certainly he was no longer Bœotian. An austere person would have said: "Now you are making for us the history of a perverted Bœotian."

It should further be observed that, in the end, one always comes to have the opinions consistent with one's talent. Renan's talent was a tremendous felicity in expressing most delicate shades of thought. This talent gave him certain mental habits.

He had contradictory opinions, because he was wonderful at expressing simultaneously and almost in the same word contradictory ideas, and at gliding imperceptibly, in the turn of a sentence, from negation to affirmation, without a hint of conviction. The flexibilities of his style passed to his mind. He was too good a writer not to end up by being a bad thinker. Very expert orators always begin their sentence without knowing how they will finish it, knowing always that it will finish without difficulty. Renan began to think without knowing where his thought would lead him, sure that it would turn out plausible and attractive.

The last characteristic of this state of mind was that in the same way his intellect, after so much exercise, so continued a development and so magnificent an unfolding, came at last to act as though without object, from itself and to satisfy itself. Just as "the chicken whose brain has been removed continues under certain stimulations to scratch its nose," so his intellect, caught in habit, worked, if not in a vacuum, at least without a very definite object, seducing itself by the easy and sure play of its astonishing faculties. As orators end up by experiencing a need to talk, and talk eloquently almost without occasion or material, Renan had a need to think, and thought ingeniously, cleverly, skilfully, when there was neither occasion nor very evident necessity to prove anything. Perhaps it was a sort of decadence—I am willing to admit that it was, partly—but it was a singularly brilliant decadence, which would have been the height of another man's brilliance and development.

Even his character had changed a little. His timidity, by dint of being hidden under agreeable irony, had disappeared, if not ceased to exist; his tenacity, his intransigeance, his inner firmness, which never altered, were no longer clearly in evidence. He went about among men as a sweet old man, smiling, even gay, inexhaustibly indulgent, with an incredible facility for approval. He never discussed, seemed always delighted with the depth of thought that was expressed before him, and as little as possible sure of the importance and justness of his own, and one was free to believe that he had natural goodness, secret irony or indifference, and probably the truth is that he had a little of all these things. He seemed to want to be the refined conciliator between

men, as he had been, in the hospitality of his vast mind, the subtle conciliator of ideas. He gave an impression of a modern Montaigne, more learned, more open to different sets of ideas and to different kinds of beauties, more modest also, and truly better, but as free, as detached, as neutral among parties, as heedless of propaganda and of personal action, as agreeable, and everybody would have desired, as did Madame du Deffand the other Montaigne, " to have him as neighbour."

Although there is much truth in this picture that has been drawn of him, it is not altogether true. Although Renan was never in any way frivolous, the new Renan covered up the old without altering him, without consuming him and perhaps to preserve him the better. This new Renan was not artificial, but he was not profound; he was of a superficial reality. Like very rich people, Renan allowed an *ego*, which was part but not the whole of his *ego*, to live on the surface of himself. He lived well in the glistening brilliance of his plumage, but he lived even better in the depths of his heart. When he published *The Future of Science*, as if to recall himself to mind and remind others of what he had been, and to enjoy somewhat the effect of surprise which this sudden reconciliation would produce, he said sweetly in the preface: " There is a little too much optimism in it, a little too much boldness of assertion; but at bottom I have scarcely changed." It was true. It was the foundations which had not changed in him, and these were his faith in science, his confidence in progress and his cult of the Ideal. This faith was less whole and, above all, less certain of a rapid realization; this confidence was less naïve and allowed that on the road to progress there are halting-places and periods of retrogression; this cult was less earnest and permitted itself respites and moments of bad humour and, what is more serious, of good humour, towards its object; but all three remained. Renan had known all forms of scepticism, detachment, dilettantism, irony and even levity; he had never known the basis of these, had never had their essence in him. The essence of scepticism is indifference, and this is something to which Renan never went down or, if you like, rose up. He gave proof of this when a public misfortune, or something that he considered as such,

a humiliation or a moral and social degradation, threatened his country. He was no longer either ironical or even condescending in his words and his attitude. On such days, on leaving him, people said: "The man of 1848 has returned again." And more even than in his ideas he remained constant in his character. He was distinguished by disinterestedness, disdain for material interests, application to obscure, useful and unremunerative tasks, even when his name at the bottom of an amusing page was for him, when he liked, a little fortune; the greatest seriousness in the accomplishment of his daily duty; stoicism in suffering; in a word, no longer just the cult, but the practice, of the Ideal were things which the world did not know about him, and which were as natural to him on his last as on his first day. A hundred times he compared himself to a priest, "a would-be priest" who often yearns for his original vocation. He was really a priest; and he always had this yearning, but he passed the greatest part of his life in satisfying it. To the "century's chatterers" he gave much, because he was rich; he gave them ideas, fantasies, paradoxes, poems, novels, and even threw in some worldly religions; for himself he always reserved an inner life, profound, serene and delicious, in which he tasted the intimate delight of existence —or whatever may be the name it is given—with what is eternal, and of distinguishing himself from those who are mortal, which was another pleasure he did not despise.

V

Renan, then, was distinguished by a sovereign intellect, which sometimes indulged in princely games. Through a sort of intellectual demiurge his way of formulating the world was to think of it in one way, then in another, then in yet another, without tiring and while ceaselessly enlarging it; for he did not destroy the moulds in which he had made an original form, but found them again, took them back again and drew from them new copies, which he associated with the most recent fashionings which he had imagined for the universe. General ideas were thus accumulated in his mind, then were organized, linked more or less closely and formed into groups, at any rate very harmonious

and very imposing. Each of his systems was a new idea, accompanied, rather impeded and, finally, enriched by the memory of all the others. Each of his intellectual moments was an invention, which wanted to be a synthesis of all previous intellectual moments. Synthesis finally became impossible and Renan was embarrassed in the arrangement of his train by the accumulation of his riches. Still, that was of little importance to him. The essential thing for him was that humanity and the universe should be successively reflected in him in all their aspects, and that, in reading his books, there should hardly be a profound thought, a big philosophical, scientific, historical or religious conception, which was not found more vividly understood and more vigorously expressed than it had ever been by anybody else. The ideal universe would be the realization of all possible things. Renan might have wished that his work should be the expression of all possible intellectual things.

From all these varied aspects and multiple considerations, one day an impression of harmony had to be evolved; he evolved it himself from time to time, but he counted especially on the reader of the future to disentangle it, and took too much delight in varying his ways of thinking and feeling to be very anxious about connecting them all to a unity. Even this diversity was a need of his mind, a necessity of his nature: "A mind can give expression to itself only by sketching in turn various points of view, of which each one is true only in the mass. *One page is necessarily false*: for it says only one thing, and the truth is only the *compromise* between an infinite number of things." The Albert of *Werther*, "when he thought he had made an exaggerated, too general or doubtful assertion, never ceased limiting, modifying, adding or retracting until nothing of his proposition remained." Renan despised this ridiculous method of procedure. He followed his present thought to its farthest limit always, even if the next day he should follow the opposite—that is to say, complementary—thought to its limit; and sometimes on the same day he made his way in two different directions; and sometimes in the same phrase, and then he really got back rather to Albert's procedure, but it was by contradiction, not by attenuation, so that, instead of there remaining nothing of his proposition, there

were rather two of them. And it was for the future or for the public judging the whole to disentangle the *compromise*.

This compromise—the word, seemingly too modest, is, however, correct—was for the public as follows: considered as a whole, in the main and rather clumsily, Renan was a positivist who was yet a Christian. Of Christianity, except the dogma, he kept everything—the taste for inner life; the cult of the ideal; the effort to get into touch with the Infinite; contempt for the earth and a sort of mistrust of the "world"; a sort of humility which he associated with the objects of his disdain, for humility does not exclude disdain for others, provided that one has it for oneself; taste for and sufficient, even unusual, practice of disinterestedness; and insufficient, but real, charity, which, relatively to the times in which we live, was fairly alive; a sort of happy incapacity to keep metaphysics at least out of his preoccupations, which, in Bossuet's language, goes by the name of "the taste for God"; in a word, all the essential features which characterize the ordinary state of soul of a Christian. And to these must be added the habit of examining his conscience, with its very great advantages and some of its perils, and the habit of praying or, as he said, of "orison," which left traces in many pages of his works and among the finest. All these things were, so to speak, the effects of Christianity without their cause, preserved in a soul which was originally tended by the Church; like the products of Christianity carried away far from the soil where they were produced. "We live," he said, "on the perfume of an empty vase." I will say, rather, that he had the background of sentiment and instincts on which Christianity springs up when it must spring up, on which it has flourished since Christ, and even a short time before, on which it would flourish again if, from one cause or another, rationalism wavered or lost a little of its sway. Renan represents moral Christian life apart from formal and codified Christianity. He was a Christian in the same way as would be a catechumen whose missionary had forgotten to mention the decrees to him. I realize that this missionary is rather fantastic, and this Christianity a little vague. It is, however, a sort of Christianity, and not only does the perfume hang about it, but the mind lives in it.

From positivism he had firmly adopted the big principle that nothing in the ways of the world is supernatural; he had accepted this idea that there cannot be either, on the one hand, revelations or, on the other, human proof of things that are beyond the range of observation; he believed, consequently, that the only instruments with which man may gain knowledge are observation, science and reasoning; he believed that these instruments were the social implements and that man's duty was the scientific and rational organization of humanity; and he believed, finally, that the laborious and slow *processus* towards perfection was at this price, and that, consequently, the social implements—observation, science and reason—were implements of progress.

Such were his two faiths, the one of sentiment, the other of reflection, the one of soul, the other of mind; and, fond of being complete, taking pleasure in being rich and not disliking to be complex, he did not sacrifice either one or the other. To the one he gave up his moral life, realizing that moral life and even all morality (except social morality, which is where the transcendent conception of a civilizing agency can arise) had no rational basis, no reasoned reason, was scientifically and rationally an absurdity, and existed solely for the pleasure of existing, in which precisely its dignity consists. To this same faith he also gave up his metaphysical meditations, giving them loyally for dreams, poems and beautiful mystical hymns; but pointing out that humanity lives on æsthetics as on science, and will be degraded, will experience a sort of *diminutio* when it forgoes such dreamings—a thing which, by the way, will never happen.

To his scientific faith, as a man of his age, as a man who has no connexion with the Middle Ages, as a loyal workman who accepts the rule of the factory where he works, and who, moreover, adopts its spirit and approves its aim, he gave four-fifths of his working time, studying languages, writing history, deciphering and collecting inscriptions, teaching Hebrew, contributing with all his forces, right up to the day when he had exhausted them, and even past that day, to the scientific edifice that humanity sets up in order the better to regulate itself, if possible, on earth.

These two faiths are not, perhaps, formally very reconcilable. They are reconciled in the very basis of human nature; they are

reconciled in real life, in true life, shall I say in living life, because they are the expression of two equally imperious needs of our nature. Each of these needs believes that the other is artificial and will soon disappear, and, in truth, according to periods, one gets the better of the other and makes out that the other was only accidental with us, and like an illness lasting some centuries. Finally, they both seem to be immortal, and their oscillation ends up by giving an idea of perfect balance. It is therefore possible that Renan, with his apparent duality, gave the formula for the future and also that of the past, and fairly well typified human nature itself, in so far as it is possible for a man to give an approximate representation of it.

His influence was, as can be guessed, very considerable. All his suggestions had authority precisely because of their correctives. "The Christian spirit" of a man who had broken gloriously and decisively with organized Christianity could not be suspected; nor was there anything suspicious about the rationalism of a man who was so firm on the question of the exclusion of supernaturalism, while his tendencies were so religious and almost mystical. His conclusions in different directions cost him too much not to be serious. He profited by the conflict which was set up in his sentiments. People liked to follow him because of that. He came to be looked upon as a guide who was guided only by investigation. When the pleasure of thinking led him on to a diversity of conceptions, which resembled a sort of vagrancy, again people followed him. He also rendered service as a wonderful agitator of ideas. It is permissible to be something of a sophist when one has thrown into the world, with insistence, some very clear, general ideas, which are the centre to which disciples can attach themselves, and when, consequently, those which come afterwards are manifestly intellectual recreations and brilliant exercises of the mind. The mania of "looking for truth after it has been found," with which he reproached himself so elegantly, must be very guarded, but it is not without advantages. It is like a control of previous operations of the intellect which brings completely to light the results formerly attained, and also the digressions so formed end up by referring back to the original object.

The scepticism to which Renan seemingly inclined some of his contemporaries, who were too attracted by his last style and saw only it, was scarcely more than a fairly short-lived fashion. He left behind him a real restoration of the religious spirit in the class of men who clung to the dry and brutal negation familiar to the eighteenth century. He left behind him a wider and more liberal rationalism, which can make room beside it for the noble tendencies of human nature and for the delicate loves of the heart. " There he is again," said Doudan, " preparing for the public use delicacies perfumed with the Infinite." It is something to find, and without effort, the means of making the Ideal felt by men who have lost, or believe they have lost, the need for it.

Above all, he left behind him, and all Renan's work expresses it, a really new spirit of tolerance. Until Renan, tolerance itself had something dry and negative about it. Roughly, people said : " Let others think absurdities. Let them do what they like. Man has the right to be stupid. Do not let us persecute or annoy him. That is all our duty towards them." But there is something better to do ; it is to prove that all the big ideas of humanity are worthy of a certain respect, because they are all based on reason ; it is to seek in each idea the portion, or the appearance, or the more or less remote reflection, of truth, which it may, and must, contain, and to point it out to mankind. Active tolerance is not an abstention, a thing which never goes without contempt. It is a hospitality, a good welcome, which does not involve adhesion, but is an act of " good will." This hospitality was practised by Renan with intelligence and earnestness ; also with a slight abandon, which would indicate that there is also a tendency towards scepticism. But it is all a question of proportion. There is no tolerance without a certain admixture of scepticism : and tolerance is so fine a thing that it must not be denied an intercourse, provided it be discreet, with this companion. Renan taught men true tolerance, the sort which rouses a man, without abandoning his convictions, to inquire benevolently into those of other people, to give them consideration, to regard them as praiseworthy and fine, if not on a sure foundation, to congratulate an adversary on his convictions even while trying to detach

him from them, and to console him for causing him to abandon them. All this is rather refined ; but it is refinement of the heart as much as of the mind ; and it is an exquisite form of fraternity.

This great intellectual set a very considerable example. He proved by his life that the progressive widening of the intellect is accompanied by an enlargement of the soul. According to Renan, the last thought of Marcus Aurelius, in regard to our poor species, was " a mild feeling, mixed with resignation, of pity and hope " ; and this last thought must have been also, after so many investigations in every direction into the past and future of humanity, that of Ernest Renan.

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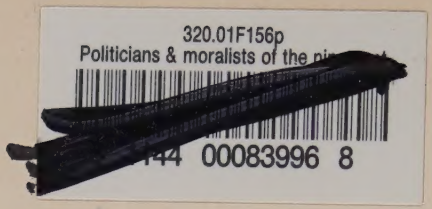
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